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THAT MOST DISTRESSFUL COUNTRY.

A Novel.

BY

E. C. BOYSE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THAT MOST DISTRESSFUL COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

"There cometh a crash, and a cry of need,
A puff of smoke and no more to tell,
But a dangling rein, and a plunging steed,
And a rider lying where he fell.

"Ere the smoke hath melted in air above,
Or the blood soaked in where the hoof hath trod,
The true heart beateth its last for love,
And the soul is gone home to God."

THE gallery was deserted by all but Bridget, who told me poor old Mr. Harcourt was "as dead as Cromwell, with a bullet through his head."

"But shure, my lamb, you must not thrimble so," she added encouragingly; "for I believe the fight's over, and we are not destroyed after all!"

"Where is Mr. Gordon?" I exclaimed, as looking down into the hall I saw that her words were so far true that there seemed no one there but the dead and the wounded.

"Ah, my darlint, I think he is off after the boys with the rest; I belave I saw him go; but 'tis not aisy to tell so dark as it is below."

I could not believe this possible after the blow I had seen him receive from Flanagan;

and begging Bridget to come with me crept trembling down into the hall.

"Will I get a light?" said Bridget. "If he is here, and don't spake how will we see him? It's as dark as a dog's throat."

I was too cowardly to let her leave me, and went to the spot where I had last seen him reel back under the blow.

One or two forms lay there almost undistinguishable, and touching something accidentally, its icy coldness gave me a sudden terror as I realized it was the hand of a dead man.

"Call him, darlint; maybe he is handy but can't tell what we are," whispered Bridget.

Her idea was right, a voice answered me faintly after the second call.

"Where are you?" I cried joyfully.

"Here, dear, close to you, I think, by your voice, but I don't know myself where I am exactly."

"Shure he must be under the stair," cried Bridget.

And down on her hands and knees she went promptly, and began dragging something heavy from under the staircase with such energy that there was a speedy remonstrance of:

"Bridget, my good soul, have mercy. I have some feeling left."

But she persevered till he was drawn out into a comparatively open space, and then

the good creature laughed and cried for joy to find him alive.

"Water, water, for pity's sake!" he gasped.

Bridget fetched some and he drank it eagerly, and with her help staggered to a chair.

"Let me get to the air and I shall be better," he said faintly.

I did not know if it were safe to go to the door, and I shrank from passing among the bodies of the dead or wounded which lay between us and it. Bridget seeing me hesitate, strode across to the great door, and after a glance out returned to us, saying:

"Come away to the little side door, darlint, then, 'tis not fit for you to be looking out of the other just yet."

I remembered how many must have fallen outside there, and was glad to escape the sight, and Bridget went on briskly:

"Now, sor, lean on me; shure I'm strong as any horse."

With some trouble Arthur walked to the side door from which the sortie had been made.

His cry for water had reached the ears of other sufferers, and piteous appeals were heard, so refilling her jug, Bridget went back to minister to them, as soon as she had seen the fresh cool breeze bring back a shade of colour to Arthur's face, and found he could support himself by leaning against the doorway.

"Is it all over, Bride?" he said presently. "Where is every one, and how long did it last after I went down?"

I could tell him little enough, but explained I had been with Lizzie, who was wounded.

"Was it not Lizzie I was trying to help?" he asked. "I am not clear about much at the last, but I do remember some woman was in danger, and I got a blow in the chest that knocked me over."

I told him what had happened, and asked how he got under the stair.

"I felt myself pushed under, and some one said, 'He'll be safe there, dead or alive;" and then two or three more were cut down, and fell so as to block me in completely, and I was nearly stifled, and that's all I knew till I heard your voice, dear."

"Are you much hurt?" I asked.

"I can hardly move for pain, nor draw my breath; but it's nothing serious, only bruises, I fancy. It's little short of a miracle how we have escaped. I trust they will not follow the rebels too far."

We could see and hear nothing where we sat, for only Sam's horse had been killed in the sortie, and so all was quiet enough. The birds were coming to roost in the ivy; a bat flew out, and in the pale sky the evening star showed faintly; presently old Tabby, the cat, crept round the house, and ran to me joyfully, purring and rubbing her head on

me, and jumping in my lap, curled herself round cosily.

Arthur leant back in silence, closing his eyes, while the soft evening breeze played round us and fanned his hot temples.

A sound of hasty footsteps startled me. Towards us came running a young officer whose fair face and golden hair had struck me before.

As he came up, Arthur held out his hand, saying:

"Cecil Geraldyn! who would have thought of seeing you?"

"Oh, Gordon, I am glad to find you," the young man cried eagerly; "I knew you were here."

"Let me introduce you to my wife," Arthur said. "This is a gentleman whom I have frequently had the honour of thrashing at school, Bride."

"And how often have you thrashed fellows twice your size for bullying me?" said the youth, smiling pleasantly.

Then his face clouding again he went on:

"Gordon, you have seen service, and must know something of wounds; do come and help me with a poor fellow who is lying near. Can you walk, though? You look badly enough yourself."

"Give me a hand, Cecil. If you help me to my feet, I can come with you."

"Steady, steady, my dear boy. I am none

the better for my day's work. Now, tell us who is hurt?"

"One of Lord Mohurry's foxhunters, a stout man, middle-aged. I was riding after some of the fellows, and one turned and shot my horse, and getting me down I was being worsted, when Miss Kavanagh saw me, and rode to me with this poor fellow. The rebels ran, but he was wounded somehow."

"Mr. Power?" I exclaimed.

"I do not know," said Mr. Geraldyn, "but here he lies."

My guess was right. Mr. Power was lying on the grass with closed eyes and blood frothing from his lips with every breath. Kathleen knelt by him weeping bitterly, and the Knight stood near her, stooping every now and then to rub his soft muzzle gently against her. Another horse lay stiffly outstretched some forty yards away, doubtless Mr. Geraldyn's.

One glance at Mr. Power was enough for Arthur. "Piked or shot through the lungs. He has not ten minutes to live. Can you not get Kathleen away, Cecil? it will be no sight for her."

But Kathleen would not stir from his side, saying she had sent him to his death, and would not leave him.

Opposition was so utterly useless that Arthur said no more, and sitting down, lifted the dying man tenderly and deftly, so that

the terrible struggle for breath should be relieved as much as it was in human power to do it.

What pain the effort gave him to support the wounded man's weight he only knew; but he would not let Mr. Geraldyn assist him, saying he had performed the office before for a comrade.

Mr. Power's eyes opened slowly, and he recognized Kathleen at once, and said as he struggled for breath:

"Don't cry for me—Kathleen—I am content. Was he saved?"

Nearly as much overcome as Kathie herself, Geraldyn pressed his hand, the dying man's face brightened.

"Ah, sure—that's well—Kathleen darlint, think kindly—of me—sometimes—won't you—for to-day's work——"

"Oh, Mr. Power," sobbed Kathleen. "'Tis I have destroyed you. Oh, if I could do anything for you."

"Will you—kiss me—just once?" he said.

With a rain of tears Kathie kissed him, and on his pain-wrung face shone out a smile that made him almost beautiful; then with closed eyes he struggled for breath, the blood coming with more and more force from his mouth at every gasp.

Suddenly Larry joined us, and stood apart for a moment, then exclaimed:

"Oh, when did this chance, Arthur? Bride, is he dying?"

The well-known voice reached the fast-closing ears. Once more Mr. Power looked up: "Larry— good-bye — tell them—I did—my best—could any one—say a prayer?"

Arthur was the only one whose voice was steady, but before he had said more than a few words the terrible death struggle began. It was a heartrending sight, for life was so strong in the dying man that it was a cruel fight before the spirit could pass.

To Geraldyn, for whom he had given his life, it was hard to look on powerless even to ease him of one of those torturing gasps, and Larry was losing a tried friend and comrade. But for none was it a greater trial than to Kathie, all unused as her petted darling had been to suffering of any kind; yet though her tears fell fast she knelt by him, bravely wiping the blood from his lips to the last.

Arthur held him up through it all, and when the last sigh was drawn laid down the head gently, saying:

"Thank God that is over. Poor fellow! he made a brave end. Kathie dear, you must come away now."

She rose at once, saying piteously, "You will not leave him here?"

"No, no. I will see to that," said Larry. "Arthur, what's wrong with you, though?"

"Nothing much," said Arthur, who was

leaning against the Knight for support. "One of you must help me back to the house, that's all; and, Larry, you should see to the Knight, he has had a hard day."

"Sure I will when I have seen to you," said Larry, glad to have something to divert his thoughts from the late painful scene.

We moved away slowly, Kathie and Mr. Geraldyn following. Larry said suddenly, "So you were not dead after all, Arthur, when I stowed you under the stairs?"

"Not exactly, Larry. That was your doing, was it?"

"Yes. I picked you up and put you in the first convenient corner, for the fighting was too good just then to stop to ask questions. I thought you were done for at last, though, for the big oak table had been pushed over on you."

"No wonder I am sore," said Arthur quietly. "Did you do much work outside?"

"Oh, little enough; you see, all told we were but a handful, and only half of us mounted, so Tracy pretty soon recalled us."

"Quite right Was any one else hurt on our side?"

"Not badly, I think. Father and uncle are all right, Walter got a trifle of a flesh-wound. They are looking to the wounded now, but there are not many. You made clean work, Arthur, I wonder you held out."

"If they had been better officered you'd

only have had to bury us. Tom and Flanagan are a pair of idiots. Do you know if Sam got away?"

"Yes, he got a fresh horse somehow, and Keeran says he rode off cursing and swearing and all over blood."

"He has a mark or two of mine, I fancy," said Arthur. "I see the yard door is open, let us take the Knight back to the laundry first, Larry; the stables are burnt, you know."

"I can see to the horse," said Larry. "Why don't you go in, Arthur? you can hardly stand now."

"I would like to speak to Geraldyn, and once I give in I shall not be any good for some time," Arthur replied. "Cecil is an old schoolfellow of mine."

"They're taking their time," grumbled Larry, looking back to Geraldyn and Kathie, who were leading the Knight.

With a look of amusement Arthur said aside to me:

"Kathie is on the banisters, I fancy, if not halfway down."

Remembering his old simile I looked at the pair with surprise, saying:

"She never saw him before to day."

"Ah, but when a girl rides to help a man in danger——"

"A fellow rides to help a girl, you mean," interrupted Larry; "the hall table's upset your wits, Arthur. Geraldyn saved Kathie just as

she got to camp from a rebel who was chasing her."

"And Kathleen and poor Power pulled Geraldyn out of another fight just now, Master Larry," replied Arthur; "that's how Power got his death."

The others were too close now for Larry to answer in words, but as he tended the colt he whistled "Love's young dream" significantly. It was but just written then, and was considered one of Moore's best songs.

CHAPTER II.

"Curst be the heart that thought the thought,
And curst the hand that fired the shot,
When in my arms burd Helen dropt,
On fair Kirconnell lea.

"O, think na but my heart was sair
When she dropt down and spake nae mair,
I laid her down with mickle care,
On fair Kirconnell lea."

Larry gave the Knight a hasty rub down, saying he would find Kinsella, for he supposed Major Tracy would be off at once, and he wanted something to eat if it could be had.

We were all waiting in the laundry, Arthur and Mr. Geraldyn talking as men do who have been boys together and still retain the old boyish friendship at heart.

Kathie, still too excited to feel tired, was telling Larry and I of her adventures in a fragmentary fashion, and I could see Mr. Geraldyn's eyes were rarely moved from her, and that he often forgot what he was saying to Arthur in listening to her.

Larry's remark about Major Tracy recalled Lizzie's danger to my mind, which I had almost forgotten in the excitement of the search for Arthur and Mr. Power's death.

Now, though all these three men had been

dealing death and wounds to other men coolly enough for hours, the tidings of Lizzie's plight moved them all strangely, and not one of them had nerve to go and inquire how matters went; so it was agreed that Kathleen should go and cater for food and wine, which no doubt many besides Larry and Mr. Geraldyn needed badly, and I would go to Lizzie and get news of her condition.

I should have thought it wiser for Arthur to go to his room, but he would not, and when a man's mind is made up it's not much use to cross him, for he is sure to take his own way all the more for being contradicted, so he went with the others. I had nerved myself for some such scene of suffering as we had just had to witness, but I need not have done so.

Lizzie had visibly gone a long way towards the dread portal we all must pass, but she was suffering hardly at all, and Major Tracy hung over her, striving by every means in his power to delay the parting which was so sadly near; but even with her lover's strong arms holding her back to earth, Lizzie was content to leave him.

She seemed so perfectly convinced that in time he would perhaps have regretted wedding with a rebel's daughter that she was glad to go while his heart was all her own, and she looked peaceful and even radiantly happy.

With her old bright smile she greeted me

and asked after Arthur's safety, but she could hardly speak now for weakness. Mother and Eveleen raised her to give her a little wine, and Major Tracy whispered to me aside:

"Is Geraldyn safe?"

"Yes, do you want him?" I said. "Let me fetch him."

With mechanical courtesy he would have gone himself, but I told him he should not leave Lizzie, and ran away to summon Mr. Geraldyn before he could forbid me.

With intense sympathy in his handsome boyish face, Cecil Geraldyn stood outside Lizzie's room to receive the orders necessary from his senior officer. He might not have felt so much for him had he never seen Kathleen. As it was he could not suppress a slight start when Major Tracy bade him see all were ready to return to camp in an hour and a half; but he said nothing till the door closed on Major Tracy, then turning to me he exclaimed:

"Mrs. Gordon, can he be going to leave her? I know he is a disciplinarian, but——"

"I suppose he knows she will leave him," I answered sadly.

"Is it so? Ah, poor fellow! Well, I must go. I wish I could do anything for him; Mrs. Gordon. Arthur is gone to his room at last, he could neither eat nor drink, and we made him go."

"I am glad of it," I said. "He has had a

terribly hard day, and was badly wounded very recently; I will go to him at once."

We went down the passage together, and at the bedroom door Mr. Geraldyn held out his hand to me, saying:

"I fear I shall not see you again before we leave. Good-bye, Mrs. Gordon."

I said good-bye to him, but he kept my hand a moment, hesitated, and blushing like a girl, said:

"This is our first meeting, but I hope not our last. Arthur is one of my oldest friends, almost like a brother to me."

He seemed to wish to say something further, but after a pause went off suddenly. I found Arthur had thrown himself on the bed too exhausted to undress, but he said he was only tired out, and should be better after a rest.

He was amused at Mr. Geraldyn's farewell, and said, "Possibly he hopes to become a brother-in-law. I have hardly seen the boy for years, though I know them all well; but he was evidently desperately smitten by Kathie, it was absurdly manifest."

Arthur did not care to talk, and when he had drank some water seemed inclined to sleep. So I left him and returned to poor Lizzie.

Mother and Eveleen were sitting in the window, and I joined them silently.

"The grey shadows are on her face,"

mother whispered. "We have left them alone."

There was hardly any light in the room, and no need for it; all that could be done for the poor girl was at an end. She could no longer swallow. So we sat together without speaking, for we were all weary, and filled with a great pity for those two who were going through the pain which, but for God's mercy, might have fallen to any of us in the day past.

There were now and then a few murmurs passed between the lovers, and once Major Tracy said audibly:

"As I hope for heaven, no other woman will ever take your place, darling."

But as time went on and Lizzie's life ebbed fast there was silence. Suddenly with a momentary return of strength, she raised herself for the last kiss, and when that long embrace was over she was gone to her rest; and her lover knelt by her, with his head buried in his hands, sobbing bitterly.

Eveleen and I were helpless to deal with that terrible grief, and we stole away, leaving mother alone with him.

Half an hour later he rode away with his men, erect and soldierly as ever, and his voice was clear and firm as he gave his orders. Only to the last he looked back to the window where the lights were burning now, and his love lay in her last sleep.

CHAPTER III.

"The heroes of Wexford are burst from their chains,
And the shout of the victor is loud o'er her plains.
The rebels are broken, their horsemen are fled;
And the pride of their hosts on the mountain lie dead."

It seemed at first as if we could never settle down quietly again, after the excitement of the attack on Ballydorough.

But in a few days the dead were buried, the wounded mending, and the old house repaired. No great material damage had been done, thanks to the thickness of the walls.

Somewhere, perhaps, women's tears flowed for the men who were put in one nameless grave.

And one brave soldier carried a great sorrow for the loving girl whose dark eyes would never again brighten at his coming.

Indeed, we all felt poor Lizzie's death deeply. Good old Mr. Harcourt had gone in the fulness of time, and had no near ties left, but Lizzie was so strong and bright and full of life and beauty, it seemed impossible she should be dead. And then she had been so fond of us all and of Ballydorough. It was perhaps well for Eveleen that Walter's wound proved worse than he had thought, and gave her some nursing to take her thoughts from

her loss. Arthur would not lay by any more, but was up and about the day after the siege, though he looked wretchedly ill. However, he was so useful, in advice and otherwise, that I did not gainsay him, though I feared he would feel his exertions later.

Uncle was the most undisturbed, though in his own quaint fashion he did many things no one would have dreamt of his undertaking; but he never grudged his own trouble if he could spare mother.

A very strong regard had sprung up between him and Arthur, though he manifested it in dry speeches; however, Arthur seemed to understand him, and they were much together.

We had heard no tidings from the outer world, and were growing so eager for news that at last uncle persuaded father to ride with him and see if they could pick up some intelligence.

Arthur was anxious now to return to England as soon as might be, so we had plenty to think of, and indeed I was glad to have such a great change before me after the long sad time, and though I dreaded Lady Rachel still, the last few weeks had taught me some self-confidence.

It was late before father and uncle returned, but when they came they brought good news.

Wexford was in the hands of the troops, the camp on Vinegar Hill broken up, and it

was hoped the worst of the rebellion might be nearly over, at least in our neighbourhood.

There was still, however, to be feared that many had fallen victims before the troops entered the town. Terrible rumours were afloat of men, and even women, being dragged from the prison ships or the jails, to be tortured on Wexford bridge by being run through with pikes again and again, the cruel executioners purposely selecting places not mortal, and raising their victim aloft writhing in agony, while they exulted round him savagely, and even the children and women looked on rejoicing in these horrors.

Thomas Dixon, Loo Walker's husband, had been heard declaring, "not a prisoner should live out the day," and both Dixon and his wife were riding about the town all the day before it was taken, encouraging their forces by word and action, Loo even going so far as to swear she would shoot down with her own hand any man who showed the white feather.

It was supposed, however, only half the massacre was accomplished, for while the work was at its height tidings came that Vinegar Hill was in the hands of the soldiers, and the rebels retreated before the advance of General Moore's brigade, without firing the town as was proposed. There had also been engagements at Arklow and Gorey; but it was pretty sure that Larry was safe, for which we were all thankful.

Arthur asked for news of Mr. Geraldyn, but it was only known that few of the loyalist officers were hurt, so we hoped he was spared, and then mother inquired after the Walkers and Colcloughs; of the former nothing had been heard, but the Colcloughs had escaped and Bagenal Harvey also, and were supposed to be in hiding.

"On the Saltee Islands?" said Walter.

"What makes you say so?" asked Evie.

"Only a guess from something Vesey once told me," Walter answered.

His guess proved correct. The next news we heard was that an armed boat was sent out to the Saltees, and landing with difficulty, for a gale blew at the time, they searched the island and found in a little hut some handsome dresses and plate, which confirmed their suspicions; but so cleverly were the unfortunate fugitives hidden, the search lasted for some hours, but in the end they were discovered in a little cave among the rocks on a precipitous cliff, and feeling further attempt at escape vain, they surrendered.

Every courtesy was shown them by their captors, who, at least, knew how to be generous to their unfortunate prisoners.

Poor Bagenal Harvey had to be carried to the boat; from fatigue and anxiety he was utterly exhausted.

His fatal want of prudence had ruined them all; had he taken even ordinary precautions

they might have escaped discovery; but he had recklessly chosen to set sail for the islands almost openly, and all too late he bitterly regretted the folly which doomed his friends to death as well as himself.

The next vessel that sailed from Wexford to England carried not only Arthur and myself, but Kathie among its passengers.

After the excitement of the attack on Ballydorough and her wild ride, Kathie seemed unable to settle into the quiet home ways that had contented her before. She missed her playfellow Larry, and deplored the prospect of our departure, till uncle suggested she should accompany us, for much as he professed to lament over her, he delighted in her gaiety, and was proud of her undeniable loveliness. Arthur was willing enough to take her, thinking her company would soften the pain of leaving home for me, and said Lady Rachel never objected to a visitor who was likely to be attractive, and that Kathie could hardly fail to be. She was enchanted at the prospect, danced round Arthur and uncle, declaring she was pining for a peep at the gay world, and finally ran off to tell all the household.

"I do not profess to understand your incomprehensible sex," said uncle to me as she disappeared. "But I flatter myself I know a little of my own, and a glimpse of town life may further Kathie's interests."

"What an oracular speech, uncle," said Arthur; "will you interpret, please?"

Uncle had recourse to his snuff-box before answering, then said:

"My good nephew, rustic beauties are not to every man's taste, nor is your predilection for domesticity usual among the young sparks of the day. I own I trembled for Bride's fate when I heard of her choice, but from observation, I am satisfied as to its wisdom."

"Thank you, sir. I had trouble enough to convince Mr. Kavanagh that I knew my own mind."

"He has also seen boys gather primroses, and cast them aside when their first freshness was past," said uncle shortly.

"You are poetic, sir; but it is an appropriate emblem, for Bride, she resembles the prettiest flower of the year. Kathie is more like a diamond, many-sided and flashing."

"And at present in the rough," said uncle; "let her be polished, and then men will see the brilliancy of her natural advantages. If your mother will but deign to impart a tithe of her fascinating power to Kathie, the child should be charming."

So Kathie went with us, and uncle, always liberal, gave us both a handsome sum wherewith to buy fineries in London, for in the state of Ireland nothing could be procured there.

Our ship was a miserable one, but luckily

we were all good sailors and did not care, for some of the ladies on board suffered sadly, and gave great anxiety to their protectors.

I could not forget our first attempt to leave Ireland, and did not feel safe till we were really in England at last, and on our way by coach to London. It was a long, hot journey, and we were all weary and travel-stained when we drove up to Lady Rachel Gordon's London house.

Three men-servants received us, and ushered us up into a room, which to my unaccustomed eyes was magnificent in its profusion of ornaments, china, pictures, rich tapestries, and embroideries everywhere. The light was subdued by lace curtains, and the air heavy with perfumes.

Arthur, to whom it was all natural enough, found us seats, and throwing himself into a chair, began to play with a monkey which was chained to a gilt stand. Kathie gazed round with childlike astonishment, and I sat silent, feeling my heart sink lower and lower as I caught sight of my own reflection in a great mirror, and felt my pale face and plain grey dress unutterably insignificant.

Time passed and no one came; Arthur grew impatient and was about to ring, when the door opened, and with a rustle of silken draperies a lady entered.

"Ah, at last!" Arthur exclaimed, and springing up went to her as if to embrace

her; she languidly extended a delicate white hand glistening with diamonds, and with a sudden change of expression he bowed over it, in courtier-like fashion, and just touched it with his lips.

She was so rarely handsome, and looked so young in the soft light, that I could not believe her to be Lady Rachel, or the mother of the man who stood by her, for thin and worn with recent illness, Arthur might have passed for years older than she seemed to be, at first sight.

Nor could I think so formal a greeting could pass between a mother and a son whose life had been in such danger.

So altogether I was taken by surprise when I found myself being presented to her, could not make any suitable reply to her polite speech, and felt a wretched conviction that Arthur must be desperately ashamed of me. Lady Rachel gave one sweeping glance at us both and said:

"With your usual abruptness, Arthur, you have left me uncertain which is Mrs. Gordon." She turned to Kathie, who answered quietly:

"I am Kathleen Kavanagh, madam." She drew herself up and looked so lovely as she spoke I did not wonder at Lady Rachel's look of wonder as she replied:

"Ah, pardon my mistaking you for your sister."

More than ever feeling that Arthur's choice must be incomprehensible to his mother, I was thankful to sit down again, though I could hardly keep the tears from my eyes, for every moment seemed putting a greater distance between Arthur and myself, and even his manner of speaking seemed changed and formal. Lady Rachel turned to him with more animation, saying:

"Really, Arthur, I protest you are vastly improved in looks. I dreaded you would appear as you did before from Ireland, with a rustic, beef-fed robustness; but positively you are quite refined and interesting."

"I am delighted to win your approval," said Arthur smiling; "though I would rather not go through another such severe course of blood-letting, even to gain an accession of refinement."

"Ah, spare me!" cried Lady Rachel; "you wrote me something horrible about wounds, but I really could not read the letter. My dear Arthur, these are not drawing-room topics; before ladies, too."

Kathleen's eyes flashed, and her lip curled scornfully. I thought she would say something impetuous, but Arthur, with a bitter ring in his voice, answered coldly:

"A thousand pardons, I forgot myself. You see, I have been of late among ladies who had to face painful realities, and whose nerves are less easily affected."

"Ah yes, it is fortunate such Amazons exist," said Lady Rachel languidly.

"Very fortunate," Arthur replied drily. "But instead of inflicting on you anything so utterly uninteresting as details about myself, I must tell you I had the honour to be considered to bear a faint likeness to you."

"To me!" exclaimed Lady Rachel with much more interest; "who could know me in those barbarous regions?"

"Mr. George Kavanagh, my wife's uncle."

Lady Rachel tapped her forehead with her fan, as if to aid her memory.

"Ah, I have it!" she cried; "a man small but *comme il faut*, piquant, a perfect dresser and dancer, and a droll creature too. Was he your uncle, child, and what does he say of me?" she added, turning to me.

"That you were the belle of the season in his time, but I think he must mistake," I said.

Arthur looked surprised, and his mother frowned as she replied:

"I was once considered to have good looks, though I am now but a wreck."

Feeling I had been hopelessly rude, I exclaimed eagerly:

"It is impossible for any one to surpass you in beauty, madam, but I cannot believe that when he was in London you could have left the nursery; it must have been your elder sister or mother he took for you."

Lady Rachel detected the genuine tone of

my compliment, for indeed I spoke just as I felt about her looks. She was gratified, and in a much more friendly fashion said:

"Ah, child, you are a sad flatterer; my pretensions to beauty are almost obliterated by time and trouble," and with a very complacent glance at the mirror she arranged her rich dress more becomingly.

Arthur turned away impatiently; something seemed to irritate him in his mother's manner, while I was irresistibly attracted by her elegance, though I could realize now his sensitive affectionate nature had been checked and repulsed by her coldness.

"May I remind you," he said at last, "that we have had a long journey and should be glad of rest and refreshments?"

"Ah, indeed," Lady Rachel replied, opening her large eyes as if astonished; "pray ring the bell and order what you like; or stay, let Mrs. Gordon and Miss Kavanagh be shown to their rooms: they may prefer it there."

"Which are the rooms?" Arthur demanded abruptly; "I can take my wife up."

"I hardly know; Buckram arranges all that," answered his mother.

Arthur rang without another word, and his mother said:

"By-the-way, Arthur, if you are free to-night you can go with me in Lord Lindor's place; he was to have attended me to-night

to the Duke of Portishead's, but he has the gout, and you know I dislike going alone."

"For a dinner? Anywhere after that?"

"Two or three places, I almost forget," said Lady Rachel with half-closed eyes. "My maid will know. To the Geraldyns', I think; no, they dine at the duke's."

"Oh, do they?" replied Arthur. "Bride, if you can spare me I shall have much pleasure in attending Lady Rachel. Lady Geraldyn will be glad to hear of Cecil."

"Have you seen him lately?" asked Lady Rachel sharply, detecting a mischievous glance of Arthur's at Kathie as he named Cecil, and her sudden blush.

"I could not describe our meeting without harrowing your nerves, such horrors were connected with it," Arthur replied, bowing to his mother as we followed the servant to our rooms, and leaving Lady Rachel evidently somewhat curious.

CHAPTER IV.

"Some rumour also of some strange adventures
Had gone before him, and his war and loves.
He found himself extremely in the fashion,
Which serves our thinking people for a passion."

Buckram had assigned to us a pleasant set of rooms comprising, to my great relief, a pretty boudoir which was less oppressive than the grand saloon, and Kathleen's room was on the same floor. A smart maid had already possession of my scanty luggage, which I felt she utterly despised, and I was glad to make a hasty change of dress and escape from her. Arthur was in the sitting-room and remarked that he had ordered some food, for he was too hungry to wait for the Portishead dinner.

"Well, what do you think of Lady Rachel?' he asked abruptly.

"She is perfectly beautiful," I said warmly "I can hardly believe she is your mother."

Arthur burst out laughing.

"Please finish that doubtful speech off as neatly as you did the one to my lady; remember I am actually refined in appearance now."

"You look very tired," I said, "if that is supposed to be interesting; and really Lady Rachel is so wonderfully young that you

seemed far more like lovers than mother and son."

"Pray tell her that, you will rise still higher in her good graces. Do you think Mrs. Kavanagh will receive Larry in a similar way when he returns home?"

With a remembrance of Larry's vigorous hugs I could not help smiling, but Arthur was bitterly in earnest as he went on:

"I was actually deluded enough to fancy my lady might show a little concern for me for once; really, I must be a fool to expect it, after all these years."

He was evidently hurt and vexed, but with a sudden change he controlled himself and kissed me, saying:

"You have spoilt me as uncle said, and I expect every one to be as foolish as you, sweetheart. Ah, here comes Kathleen. Well, miss, what are your ideas of things?"

"Firstly, I am starving," said Kathie promptly.

"That will be remedied soon."

"Ah, but I am not equal to those superb creatures in livery yet; just send them off and wait on me yourself, Arthur. My appetite will shock them; to-morrow I shall look on them as necessary pieces of furniture."

"Bravo, Kathie," said Arthur smiling; "you will be a woman of fashion in no time."

"I mean to be," said Kathleen, drawing up her willowy figure. "Lady Rachel shall be

my model, if only to learn the knack of keeping you in your place, sir. I never saw you behave so nicely before, Bride spoils you so absurdly. Oh, Arthur, I wish I were off to lots of grand parties to-night."

"Rather you than I, Kathleen; I'm sleepy and stiff with travelling, and I have not got over that confounded old table yet; I can hardly move for the bruises. Thank goodness, here comes supper."

Arthur dismissed the servants, and we were merry enough till he had to go and dress. Kathleen, who had apparently become quite at home, chose to accompany him down to see Lady Rachel, and came back in raptures at her appearance and the brilliancy of her diamonds.

"Sure she was just a picture, and, if you won't tell him, Bride, Arthur looked as handsome as she did. Ah, they were the finest pair. Bride, now you've seen all that he's been accustomed to, don't you wonder he was so fond of Ballydorough?"

"And its inhabitants?" I asked, smiling at her frankness.

Kathleen held a light to me and inspected me critically.

"I think I'd fall in love with you if I were a man," she said quaintly. "You're so like mother, Bride, and you'll never care a bit for any one else's admiration. Now I'd just like the world at my feet. Oh, I think this house

is splendid and I love all the fineries; see, I'll practise now," and she ran off to the door, and entered with a fair imitation of Lady Rachel's dignified grace.

"'Tis queer, though," she said, suddenly relapsing into her natural manner. "Fancy Larry and Walter greeting mother that way; she could not know how ill he has been."

"It was too much for her to read the description, you see, Kathie; but are you not tired?"

"Not a bit; but I'll go to bed to shorten the night, for I'm just dying for to-morrow."

Lady Rachel did not return till near day-break, and Kathie and I had breakfasted long before Arthur appeared.

"Well," cried Kathie, "tell us all about your doings; I want some amusement. I have been all over the house and seen everything, and I would like to go for a walk; must not I?"

"Not exactly," Arthur replied, smiling at her impetuosity, "but I have some exciting news for you."

"Really? oh, tell me quick! quick!"

"Give me some tea first, Bride," he said laughing, "I am too thirsty to talk."

With a sudden spring Kathie secured the tea-pot.

"Now, sir, tell me at once, or not a drop do you have!"

She stood defying him, her eyes flashing

with fun; Arthur gave chase, but she eluded him cleverly, till unluckily the door opened suddenly, and the stately butler entering with a silver dish, received the contents of the tea-pot full on his expansive waistcoat.

Not a muscle moved of his well-trained face as Arthur, composedly taking the tea-pot, said:

"Make some more tea, Jervis."

Kathie subsided into a chair, and as the door closed after the servants, Arthur remarked triumphantly:

"You got the worst of that, Kathie."

"Jervis did, I think," said I.

"Not at all; imagine the vision that will arise before him whenever Kathleen tries to be dignified in the future; and the best of it is, she does not know my news yet."

"I hate you, sir," said Kathie stamping.

"Hate away, dear, and I won't tell you at all."

"You'll tell Bride, and I will get it out of her."

"I'll wrap the secret in my breast, and die in silence unconfessed, or go to Hounslow, which will be much the same."

"To Hounslow?" I said, "must you go to-day? When will you get back?"

"I do not know, dear, it is uncertain if my regiment lies there still; I was told last night they might have moved to Wadhurst this week, and I must see my colonel."

Just then Jervis re-appeared, calm and unruffled, with the tea-pot in hand, and a fresh waistcoat on.

"Poor Jervis," said Arthur as he retired, "never in all his days here was he so treated; he will have a horror of the wild Irish for ever. Is that your *début* as a woman of fashion, Kathie?"

Kathleen preserved a stately silence, and Arthur went on very leisurely with his breakfast, loitering over it purposely to provoke her.

As he expected, her curiosity was too strong; jumping up suddenly, she seated herself on a stool at his feet, saying coaxingly:

"Ah, do, do tell me, Arthur; sure you've teased me enough for once. Bride, darling, say you want to know too, then he'll tell us."

"I'll be magnanimous, Kathie, now I've quenched my thirst. Prepare yourself, ladies; you have greatness thrust on you. You are the town's talk for the moment."

"What do you mean, Arthur?" I cried, for I saw he was in earnest.

"Why, Master Cecil, it seems, has written off to his mother a full and most romantic account of the attack on Ballydorough, little thinking the heroines would be here, and one or two other highly-spiced accounts have reached other sources of Bride's and my previous adventures, mixed with other Irish

news; so being used up for sensations so late in the season, somehow they have taken us up."

"Did Lady Rachel know this?"

"Not till we got to the duke's. Lady Geraldyn had but just got her letter, and at my unexpected appearance she seized on me to hear what she could, and I suppose had talked it over with all the other gossips, for I was positively mobbed half the evening at the other places we went to, and at my club."

"What does Lady Rachel think of it? Is she annoyed?"

"My dear little innocent! she is charmed. Her house will be besieged all day, and she is to take you both to the grandest ball of the season to-morrow, and means to present you with costumes."

"And you will be away?" I said.

"Bride, you looked less scared when the door was forced in by the rebels. I will be back if possible. What say you, Kathie?"

"Say? why it is divine! delicious! Oh, I haven't words left," and Kathie, clapping her hands, whirled round and round the room in ecstasies.

"Be quiet, do, you will-o'-the-wisp," said Arthur, "or I'll ring for Jervis. Is that the way you are going to behave before the Prince?"

"The Prince of Wales, the first gentleman

of Europe! Will he be there? Oh, this is too lovely. Oh, Arthur, you darling, give me a dancing lesson, do."

"No need," he answered laughing. "I've taught you both all I know."

"I shall shut myself up with the big mirror and try my steps all day," and off she ran.

"Kathie is coming on fast," Arthur remarked; "when my lady has dressed her to-morrow she will be something to see, I fancy; there was no one last night could hold a candle to her for looks."

"How your mother must regret she is not hers, Gordon."

"My lady is thankful she is not," said Arthur; "Kathie would be a dangerous rival, and might exact the family diamonds and other rights which madam would little care to give up."

"I am sure I do not want her to. What would I do with diamonds? She must look splendid in them."

"She may keep them at present," Arthur replied coolly, "they are not your style, little one; but you will wear the Gordon pearls to-morrow; they are heirlooms too. Let my lady dress you as she likes, her taste at least is perfect, and she will be on her mettle as you are to be a heroine. Good-bye now, dear; I must go, my chaise has been there this half-hour or more."

Kathie and I were summoned to Lady Rachel's rooms shortly after, where she sat in elegant deshabille among piles of rich silks and other fineries.

She was in excellent humour and willing to be pleased with our thanks and Kathie's ecstasies at the dress materials which were such novelties to our eyes. The dressmaker who was in attendance went into raptures over Kathleen's figure and complexion, and artfully beguiled Lady Rachel into a selection of the most expensive and delicate materials for her dress.

I was to wear all white, for which I found Arthur had stipulated; so it was a mere question of style, soon settled; but it took far longer to decide on what would set Kathie off to the best advantage. She entered into the discussion eagerly, and I sat by wondering how she had suddenly found such ideas and self-possession.

Lady Rachel was certainly lavish in her liberality; she added to her present of dresses a number of other things, hardly asking the price, and when I would have scrupled at accepting so much, said laughing:

"Silly girl, take what you can get. I won last night; I may lose to-night; and you have nothing to wear and, I suppose, no money. Look here now."

She poured a heap of guineas out of a dainty reticule, saying, "I held good cards last

night. Arthur has a mere pittance now, child, as I suppose you know; his father had such curious ideas on things, so I will make you presentable."

I thanked her warmly and told her of uncle's gift.

"Keep it for sugar-plums," she said, "I warrant your sister will know how to make hers fly. I own I marvelled at Arthur's choice yesterday, but to-day I do not; he is too hot-tempered and jealous, she would drive him wild in a month."

Not much liking these reflections on my husband I answered:

"No one is faultless, I suppose, madam; but I have no cause to complain of these failings if they exist."

Lady Rachel laughed contemptuously.

"You probably never will have, child. It's not you little white, delicate, flower-faced things that men go mad for; you two will lead a humdrum domestic life, without any excitement, just what Colonel Gordon would have wished to chain me to. Ah, Arthur is his father's son and just as selfish."

I suppose I looked angry, for, touching my cheeks with her fan, my lady laughed, and added:

"Strephon must not be abused to Chloe, I see. It's vastly becoming to you to fire up, child. I suppose in the country people still fall in love, don't they? Ah, I wonder if

Cecil Geraldyn has made many conquests over there?"

If this was meant for Kathleen it took no effect, she stood calmly comparing the merits of two fans. I remarked:

"It is his native country; he is as much Irish as we are."

"Yes, but the Geraldyns always live in London: they have no taste for rustic felicity and dulness. I suppose you know Cecil is engaged to the Duke of Portishead's daughter?"

"Is he?" said Kathie demurely. "Shall we see her to-morrow? Do show her to me, Lady Rachel." She looked up as innocently as Mollie could have done.

Lady Rachel said hastily:

"The engagement is not exactly made public, so do not name it to any one. I thought it better to tell you, Miss Kavanagh."

"To tell me! Why?" asked Kathie, looking straight at Lady Rachel.

This childlike directness took her a little aback; she said hurriedly:

"Because Arthur said—implied rather—that you had some interest in Mr. Geraldyn."

"Pray do not make me responsible for all Arthur's flights of fancy," answered Kathie coolly. "I saw Mr. Geraldyn altogether for a few hours, that is all."

"He is a very attractive man," said Lady Rachel.

"Man? I should call him a boy," returned

Kathleen scornfully. "He is not Arthur's superior either in looks or manners, and if it took some time to win Bride, she is more yielding than I am, I promise you."

She threw back her head and looked superbly disdainful.

Lady Rachel eyed her curiously, with a certain amount of admiration.

"Did the romantic circumstances that are talked of have no existence?" she inquired.

"The romance was but this, Lady Rachel. I being in some danger, he jumped his horse over a hedge to help me. Later in the day his rash inexperience got him also in some risk, and I happening to see it, summoned a gentleman to his aid, who unfortunately lost his life in rescuing Mr. Geraldyn; that is all. In Ireland such trifles have counted for little of late, I can assure you."

Kathleen spoke quietly, and turning aside, resumed her examination of the fans. I was fairly astonished at the high hand she carried it off with; so was, I think, Lady Rachel, who, after a minute's silence, remarked:

"I am glad you take such a wise view of things, Miss Kavanagh. Your wonderful ride, though, has afforded food for conversation."

"Indeed?" said Kathie. "How interesting Bride's adventure must be thought, then."

"Ah! that reminds me," said Lady Rachel, becoming once more less formal. "I vow it was in every one's mouth last night, and I

heard of nothing but Arthur's romantic bridal, and had to protest letters had been lost, and he was but just come—and a hundred other things. You must tell me all about it."

She sipped her chocolate leisurely and listened, while Kathleen, now glowing and eager again, enlarged on my short account.

She seemed little enough interested about the danger Arthur had been in, but declared my share in it was delightful, "for the contrast between my "Amazonic efforts and my appearance" would be piquant enough to set every one talking of me, a distinction I by no means coveted. It would have been nothing, she explained, had I been a fine dashing woman instead of "a mere child in looks."

Kathie, to amuse her, went on about the attack on Ballydorough, in which the romantic element was strong enough to be declared exciting, and altogether she seemed inclined to take us both into her good graces, a favour which it was clear we owed more to the chance which had brought us into some notoriety than our own merits.

CHAPTER V.

"Thy gown should be snow-white silk;
And strings of Orient pearls,
Like gossamers dipped in milk,
Shall twine in thy chestnut curls."

"BRIDE, is it really yourself?"

The speaker was Kathleen, who had stolen unperceived into my room, as I stood before the mirror looking at my own reflection in all the glories of my new dress.

"Sure, I'm not myself at all, Kathie," I said laughing, but half doubtful. "Do you like me?"

"Like you?" she cried. "You are just a picture! Look at yourself again."

I turned once more to the glass and looked gravely at myself in such unwonted splendour of sheeny satin and filmy lace, with the "Gordon pearls" wreathed into the coils of my hair and round my neck and arms.

The maid, who had left the room, returned with a bouquet of delicate white flowers, saying:

"With Mr. Gordon's love, madam."

"Is he come back?" I cried.

"No, madam; they were ordered yesterday for you."

"Ah! sure, he's a pattern husband," cried

Kathie. "I hope mine will be as attentive. Is not Mrs. Gordon's dress lovely, Camlet?"

"Perfect, miss, and I never saw a lady look better," answered the staid domestic, a quiet girl whom Buckram the housekeeper had sent to wait on me.

"Oh, if I only look half as nice!" cried Kathie who was still in her dressing-gown. "Bride, dear, the hairdresser arranged you to perfection; he has shown how soft and bright your hair is; but surely mine is too stiff."

I pulled out half a dozen pins and let the curls cluster about her neck and forehead in the natural rings like vine tendrils which became her so well, and bade her go and dress, while I went to Lady Rachel as I had been bidden to do.

She sat in a large chair trying half a dozen suites of jewels against her beautiful throat, uncertain which to wear.

"Dressed already!" she exclaimed, not turning her head, then glancing at me, she gave a little start.

"Heavens, child! who could believe it? I vow you are charming. Can it really be the little demure nun I saw two hours ago in a grey gown?"

"Cinderella turned into a princess, thanks to her good fairy," I said laughing, for I was beginning to feel elated with so much praise.

"I will not metamorphose you at midnight,"

replied Lady Rachel. "You and the Prince shall have a little longer to amuse yourselves."

"But he is not returned," I said rather sadly.

"Not returned?" she cried as if amazed. "So, child, you did not think I meant your husband, did you? Oh, you will find plenty of pretty fellows to console you for his absence, and admire you."

"No amount of admiration will make up to me for Arthur's absence," I said, half vexed at her manner.

"Thank you for that pretty speech," said an unexpected voice at the half-open door. It was Arthur himself, and I ran to him eagerly; he held me at arm's length saying:

"I am too dusty to touch your whiteness, Bride. My lady, is it permitted to enter?'

"Oh, come in if you like; but let me recommend you not to make these theatrical entrances as a rule. Listeners rarely hear any good of themselves."

Arthur laughed as he greeted his mother with the courteous formality which sat well enough on him, though it seemed so strange between mother and son.

"I knew it was my wife who was speaking," he said.

"And as a man of the world, you should know by this time that wives are usually the last people to praise their own husbands," retorted my lady, shrugging her shoulders.

"There is no reason that a husband should not praise his own wife, is there?" asked Arthur lightly, looking at me as he spoke, critically.

"My lady, I always knew your taste to be perfect; but you have surpassed yourself this time, in Bride's dress."

A compliment always pleased Lady Rachel.

"Yes, I am satisfied with it," she replied "She has just the skin for pearls, too. I am glad you are pleased with her appearance, Arthur."

"I have to thank you for it," he replied, bowing to her, "and for the pleasure of admiring Bride more than I have ever done before, which I thought impossible."

"Vastly pretty! On my word, Arthur, you improve. I despaired of your manners once, you were so abrupt; but save a few of your compliments, here comes Kathleen."

"Yes, save me dozens of them," cried Kathie, dancing in a perfect vision of beauty, attired in a cloud of pale pink and silvery gauzes, lightly caught up here and there with June roses.

"Lady Rachel, I cannot thank you!" she exclaimed, kissing my lady's hand. "There are not words enough in the English language."

"Try the Irish, Kathie," said Arthur. "The brogue is coming out powerfully as it is."

"Ah, be done with your teasing, sir; behave now, do!"

"Stand still, till I look at you, Kathie; there

against that curtain," he replied. "She'll do, I think, my lady?"

Lady Rachel did not answer; she was positively in mute astonishment at Kathie's beauty now set off by art. The dark velvet curtain threw her out in strong relief as she stood before it, her low dress showing the whiteness of her perfect neck and rounded arms. Her dark hair was raised high adding to her height, and being unpowdered it contrasted with her transparent complexion, and as suddenly the delicate wild-rose colour flushed her cheeks under our gaze and her red lips parted with a half-shy smile showing her pearly teeth, I wondered if any one could be more charming or radiant, for her eyes shone like stars with happy excitement.

"Please say something pretty to me, Arthur," she said, putting up her hands to hide her blushes.

"You have taken my breath away, Kathie, I cannot. Never mind, you will have plenty to do it presently, and being wiser than Bride you will appreciate them."

"I protest the girl's style and manner amazes me," said Lady Rachel aside to her son. "She might be a princess; mere country prettiness was what I expected."

"An apt pupil under an able mistress, my lady. When is the carriage ordered? shall I have time to dress and attend you? or will you send it back for me?"

"If you are not over-long you can come with us."

"I will make all possible haste then, certainly, in order to have the honour of accompanying the three most charming women in London."

"Oh, la, la, as if any one would look at me when these chits are by, except to remember what I was," said Lady Rachel.

"I should think rather they would look at you as the model of what these young ones may aspire to become," Arthur answered, as he and I left the room, leaving Kathie to aid in selecting the jewels.

"So you found your colonel?"

"Yes, and shall get leave; they march next week, and old Probyn, our surgeon, inspected me, vowed I was unfit to march with them, and must join when they were settled, but that if you really attended to me he shall resign, for two doctors will be unnecessary."

"I am much obliged to him for the compliment. What other news?"

"Why, Larry can come at once if he chooses, there is a vacancy; we all get a step, and the colonel will strain a point or two to get Larry, he likes a lad of spirit; the senior major resigns, and I shall get my company."

"That is delightful. Will not Larry be in his glory?"

"I hope your father will be pleased with my decision; I have positively said he should

take it. Half our men will be at the ball to-night, Bride, to look at you and Kathleen. How have you got on since I left?"

I told him of the passage of arms over Cecil Geraldyn, and he laughed heartily.

"Bravo, Kathie! my lady has met her match for once; she will admire her all the more, but I declare the girl astounds me. Won't she have a triumph?"

"I hope it will not hurt her," I said, for Kathie's new phase of character half frightened me.

"Oh, better now than after marriage; Master Cecil had better be quick if he wants her. There are plenty of better matches about than he."

CHAPTER VI.

"Saloon, room, hall o'erflow beyond their brink,
And long the latest of arrivals halts,
'Midst royal dukes and dames condemned to climb
And gain an inch of staircase at a time."

The ball was voted a sumptuous entertainment even by the London world; to Kathleen and myself, therefore, it was a scene of enchantment.

Lights and flowers and decorations everywhere in profusion. All the grand rooms of the fine old house were thrown open, and the loveliest women in town were gathered there in festal array. Everywhere was the rustle of silks and satins, and the flashing of diamonds under the lamps, as the gay company moved about talking and coquetting.

The stairs were thronged, and Arthur and Lady Rachel seemed at every step to acknowledge bows or give a greeting to some acquaintance.

Many glances were cast on Kathie and myself, but especially on her as she moved through the crowd with her graceful head carried proudly and erect.

It was a scene never to be forgotten, and all the entrancing sights and sounds and perfumes carried me so out of myself I forgot to feel

shy, even when I was introduced to the dignified hostess, the Duchess of Portishead, and her good-natured, red-faced husband, who had known Arthur from a child.

As for Kathleen she looked as much at her ease as if she were playing with little Mollie at home, was apparently quite unconscious of the many glasses that were levelled at her, and answered the duke's ponderous compliments with a jest and a smile which took his fancy so that he vowed:

"Gout, or no gout, he must dance with her," and clapping Arthur on the back asked if there were many such girls in Ireland, for since the days of the beautiful Gunnings he had seen no such bright eyes in town.

"I am a steady, married man, sir," said Arthur laughing. "If you'd asked me a few weeks since I might have been able to tell you."

His grace chuckled till he grew still redder in the face.

"That's right, Mrs. Gordon, glad you have Arthur in such order, he's been a sad dog, sad dog; keep the reins tight. Now, Miss Kavanagh, my dear, I thought I was past dancing, but your eyes would tempt an anchorite."

"I shall have to send you to Coventry, Arthur, if you bring over such fascinating creatures to beguile the duke from his duties," said the duchess smiling. "He is

neglecting Lady Condor, and half a score besides, to flirt with that lovely sister-in-law of yours."

"I am afraid he is incorrigible," said Arthur; "he has carried Kathleen off into a bower of roses already. It's a sad example for a young Benedict like myself."

"Look another way, then, you saucy boy," laughed the duchess; "go and do your duty, which is to dance all night; the girls are dying to hear your adventures. Headland has Mrs. Gordon in charge."

Lord Headland, the eldest son of the house, was a good-looking, somewhat heavy young man, not so jovial as his cheery old father, who had even now more genuinely high spirits and love of fun than the younger man; but still Lord Headland wished to be kind, seeing I was shy, and took me to see all the rooms and pointing out the people of note.

Lord Byron was there, with his beautiful refined face, spoilt by a disagreeable expression: he stood talking to an attractive, strikingly-dressed woman who wore a kind of turban, and was the celebrated artist Madame le Brun, then engaged in painting Lady Caroline, the Duke's daughter; an elderly man chatting with them I learnt was the great Sir Joshua Reynolds, and farther on a good-natured sensible, young-looking Scotchman was probably a very rising poet, Mr. Walter Scott by name.

I could hardly believe I was really in the same room with so many celebrities. Wits, beauties, military and naval heroes were shown me in turn.

"Do you know you are a celebrity yourself, Mrs. Gordon?" Lord Headland said at last. "Half the room wished to be presented to you, only I am selfishly monopolizing your society as long as it is possible."

"I fear they will speedily discover the delusion on nearer approach," I answered. "Distance lends such enchantment, if only no one questions me they can imagine I have accomplished anything they choose."

"Your modesty is useless with me, for I made Gordon give us an account," said Lord Headland. "And I shall be obliged to resign my post, I fear, for we are going to be beset; you will reserve me a dance later, will you not?"

I promised gladly, and danced in succession with so many, that I could hardly distinguish them; but I found Lady Rachel well pleased, telling me I had had all the best men in the room, and as for Kathleen, she was creating a perfect *furore*.

Later on there was a stir in the rooms, I saw people falling back, two or three gentlemen entered, and Arthur, who had just joined me, whispered:

"The Prince at last."

I looked with eagerness at our future King,

and saw a handsome gentleman, not yet so stout as he afterwards became, and looking flushed and jovial as if he had dined recently and sat long over the wine after. He was dressed with the utmost precision, as was one of his companions, who was no other than the celebrated Beau Brummel. I was so deeply interested that I could not take my eyes from the group, and did not observe that many faces were turning in our direction, till I saw the crowd making way for a smart gentleman, who tapped Arthur on the shoulder, saying a few words which I did not catch, and, offering me his arm, Arthur said:

"Bride, the Prince wishes you to be presented to him."

Before I realized what his words meant, Arthur was bowing low to the Prince, and my ordeal was over, I hardly knew how, and then with a good-natured, familiar manner, the Prince congratulated Arthur on his escape, and asked him a few questions about Ireland.

"You don't show any honourable scars, Gordon," he said, "though you are as thin as when old Saville sent you to the King with the French colours after your last campaign; but I expected the heroine of all these adventures to be a second Britomart: some one told me she stood at least six feet."

"I fear your Royal Highness has heard as exaggerated an account of my adventures as of my person," I said blushing.

"Not at all," he replied. "Is it not true, Gordon, she defended your senseless person against a score of rebels?"

Arthur bowed an assent, and vexed at such an ado about so little, I exclaimed warmly, "Surely, sir, no wife could do less for her husband?"

The Prince laughed out loudly, and turning to one of his gentlemen said:

"Gad, you and I, Jekyll, know a wife that would behave otherwise."

I remembered his own matrimonial differences and felt awkward, but he went on gaily;

"Where is the lovely sister I hear of, Mrs. Gordon? Let me judge for myself if she is overpraised."

Kathleen was not far off and was presented by Lady Rachel. She was so brilliant and happy with the excitement of the evening that I could hardly marvel at the somewhat bold look of admiration the Prince fixed on her, though they did not please me quite, and I said as much to Arthur, when we had withdrawn from the royal neighbourhood out of earshot.

"Never fear, Bride, Kathleen can take care of herself," he replied. "Little one, I am proud of you. I feared an introduction to His Highness might overpower you, but you came through splendidly!

"Luckily I had no time to think of it beforehand."

"I thought it best not to warn you. Look at Kathie; is she not a marvel of coolness? A prince is no more to her than anything else, and only the other day the child was running about wild at Ballydorough."

"Pretty way to recruit your strength, Gordon," said a dry voice close to us; and a hard-looking oldish man stood by us with a queer twinkle in his eye.

"Why, doctor, you never told me you would be here," said Arthur.

"You're not my father confessor that I know of. Is that the rival practitioner? Present me, please."

"Dr. Probyn, of Ours," was duly introduced, and Arthur went off to his partner leaving me with him. He dropped his curious bantering manner and showed a kindly liking for Arthur which won my heart at once.

"He has made a marvellous recovery," remarked Dr. Probyn, watching Arthur as he stood with his partner, Lady Caroline. "All the same he is not what he was when he went to Ireland, and this junketing is doing him no good. What's the good of telling her that? Of course she likes gadding Arthur with the rest."

This curious finale made me stare at the doctor, till I remembered hearing he had a queer way of talking to himself, so I said:

"Shall I persuade Mr. Gordon not to go to parties, then?"

He looked at me curiously and asked, "Do you mean what you say? Don't you want to be running about, showing your smart dresses and your new husband?"

"Certainly not, if it will do Mr. Gordon harm."

"On my soul, I believe she's speaking the truth," ejaculated the doctor to himself. "My dear young lady, Gordon may amuse himself in reason, but he is not fit to march with us to Wadhurst, and I call this harder work. And if he finds it so, don't you encourage him to keep on the social treadmill. He's as strong as a man need be; but our last campaign was a hard one, and half our other fellows were ill, so he did tremendous work, and it tells sooner or later."

He rambled off into campaigning stories, and suddenly broke off to point me out a keen-looking man of middle height with a large hooked nose.

"That's Sir Arthur Wellesley; you must have heard of him, even in Ireland."

"Why, sure he's my countryman," I cried indignantly, looking with admiring eyes at our great general.

"Don't call me out for forgetting it, Mrs. Gordon. Has Gordon introduced you to our colonel yet?"

"No, he wishes to, but somehow we have missed him."

"Here he is, so I will have the honour."

Colonel Saville was elderly and fatherly, and reminded me of Lord Mohurry. He asked many questions about Larry, seemed pleased with my account, and told me he was in luck to be in the regiment with Arthur, who was an excellent example.

"If, as we will conclude, he has sown his own wild oats," said the doctor.

"Do not attend to that cynic, Mrs. Gordon," said the colonel smiling. "Gordon has been one of the best of my boys, and I have some good ones."

"His father was once colonel of the regiment, I believe?"

"Yes, I served under him for years; a splendid soldier he was. Gordon in his wildest days was very careful never to do anything to cast a shadow on his name for the sake of his father's memory, and really considering his position and good looks, and his mother's love of society, Gordon has kept wonderfully straight."

I was pleased by the colonel's speech, which was spoken warmly, and said:

"You have known him many years?"

"I remember his father's marriage, and Arthur as a child."

"Lady Rachel must have been a lovely woman, then."

The colonel's eyes wandered to her as she stood not very far off in her splendid crimson draperies.

"She was always a beauty, but if it's not treason to tell you so, she was the coldest, hardest woman in the world. Gordon lavished love on her, and she cared nothing for him, even when he was dying. Don't you behave so to Arthur or we shall quarrel, Mrs. Gordon."

"I think there is not much fear of it," I answered smiling.

"If I have any skill in reading faces there is not," he said with an answering smile. "I don't agree with early marriages, but the boy has never had a home, so it's as well perhaps."

Arthur came up at the moment and said, "Ah, sir, how did you make the wife's acquaintance?"

"If you'd done your duty and introduced me you'd know, Gordon."

"Have I not been trying to all night? And now I must carry her off, for I am to dance this with her, and they will wait for us."

"Pretty behaviour to leave your betters in the lurch like this. Mrs. Gordon, tell him three is no company and send him off," said the old colonel smiling.

"I will leave you my sister as substitute," I said, for Kathie, who had missed Lady Rachel, joined us; "she is to accompany me to Wadhurst."

"Lord help the boys, then," said the colonel in a rather audible aside as he bowed low to Kathleen, and offered his arm for a stroll.

"His Royal Highness has let her go at last,"

remarked Arthur looking back. "I thought I would hear how they got on just now, so I approached them, and he was saying he must choose her a charming husband, if she would point out the style she admired."

"What did she say?"

"'When your Royal Highness is present I can look at nothing inferior.'"

"I suppose he took it for a challenge, for he whispered something rather too warm, I suspect, for Kathie just drew up her head with that innocent look like little Mollie she has at times, and said:

"'Oh, you mistake, sir; I only mean that being country-bred, a prince is such a marvel to me I can't take my eyes off one now I have the chance of seeing him.'"

"How did he like that speech?"

"In rather a huffed voice he remarked, 'Then if the King were here you would not waste a glance on me, I presume?'

"And Kathleen replied demurely:

"'A loyal subject's duty is to His Most Gracious Majesty certainly.'"

"Mother will never believe all I have to tell her about Kathie," I said wonderingly as we took our places to dance.

CHAPTER VII.

"The dancing past, the board was laid,'
And siker such a feast was made,
As heart and lip desire."

The supper was on a par with the rest of the entertainment for splendour.

The magnificent gold and silver plate was displayed in every direction. Great salvers, vases, and cups contrasted with the black oak of the sideboards. We ate off silver plates, and fruits and drinks were handed in gold baskets or goblets, and the viands were as costly. Peacocks and other birds appeared in full plumage. A naval engagement was represented in sugar, transparent jellies inclosed globes of live gold fish, and cakes and creams were moulded into temples or grottoes.

It was a wonderful sight, and I wished mother could see it, though I knew she had been to many grand parties in her youth; and I thought perhaps, too, with corn so dear owing to the wars, she might think it extravagant in its profusion when the poor were suffering; but the duke knew better than I what he could afford.

Dancing went on again merrily after supper for some hours, and though we remained after many had left, even then Kathleen was sur-

rounded by partners, who implored Lady Rachel to stay a little longer.

Yet next morning she appeared blooming and fresh as ever.

"Late hours and balls agree with you, Kathie," Arthur remarked.

"I cannot return the compliment," she replied. "You look as bad as you did after the fight at Ballydorough. Is it the effect of meeting all your old loves or was the wine bad? You'd better use old Keeran's standing joke. Was the water too strong in your punch last night, sir? I believe the duke's cellar is unimpeachable, but I did not tax it very heavily. It must be the other thing, then, or has Bride given you a curtain lecture for your flirtations? Sure I can tell her of a few."

"Had you any time to spare from your own, Kathie?" I said laughing. "You had best not begin throwing stones, I think."

"Did any one ever see a man so spoiled as he is?" cried Kathie. "Sure he is big enough to stand up for himself, Bride. At any rate my amusements don't spoil my appetite."

"I suppose, like French Barrington's ancestress, you hold men are plenty but good things are scarce?" I remarked.

"Ah, that was the lady who let her husband be hung rather than give up her castle."

"What a wise woman," said Arthur. "Take a pattern, Kathleen. Did you sit near the poet last night at supper?"

"Which of them?" asked Kathie. "Is it Lord Byron? I did now."

"He will not dedicate a sonnet to you, then. He hates to see a lady eat."

"It's the best horse that takes its corn kindly. You will not make me ashamed of my appetite, for all your teasing."

"I do not want to. It's a blessing to see a girl natural. I only wish I could follow your example to-day, but with Bride's permission to leave the table, I must lie down."

"What is wrong?" asked Kathie, giving him some cushions.

"Only a touch of low fever come back. It will not be much."

"You have never given yourself time to get over it," I said. "You ought to go back to bed again."

"Ah no. I have had enough of that; I am better here." And as Kathie brought him some tea, he said to her:

"Really is the admired of royalty going to wait on my humble self? I regret I cannot rise to make my best bow."

"You'd be teasing me on your death-bed I do think, Arthur. Ah, tell me, am I as good-looking as the Princess of Wales now?"

"Your face being usually clean and your stockings neat, on the whole, Kathie, you surpass here."

Princesses were still somewhat of a wonder

to us, and our faces of horror amused Arthur not a little.

"I am sorry to shock your loyalty, but it's true enough that the fair Princess is certainly oblivious of the necessity of soap and water. I believe when Lord Malmesbury fetched her he had to suggest that her future spouse was particular on those points."

"Is this mere gossip, or did you ever notice it?" I asked, still incredulous.

"My dear child, I need only see her untidy ancles to swear to her in any court of justice; and for the other point no one can be in her company and not notice it."

"What is the Queen like?"

"A thorough lady, but plain enough. You girls will have to be presented; there is another drawing-room."

Jervis entered at the moment with several notes on a salver which he handed to me.

"More invitations, I believe," cried Kathie with dancing eyes. "Oh, London is just paradise. Open them quick, Bride, do."

The dainty-scented notes were, as she guessed, invitations to entertainments of one kind or another, from the ladies who had already left cards on me."

"Lady Rachel will have the same," said Arthur. "Bride dear, you will have to go with her. I must give up hot rooms and late hours for a while, that's clear."

But indeed I would far rather stay with

you," I cried. "Do let me, Arthur. I am not obliged to go, am I?"

"I am not so selfish as all that," he answered. "Why should you lose your pleasure, dear? It's all fresh to you, and you enjoy it."

I knew it would be no pleasure without him, and pleaded so hard for my own way in the matter that reluctantly he gave in.

"That's right," laughed Kathie. "Can't you see Bride really prefers your society to that of all the pretty fellows we shall meet? It's small blame to you if you are vain, when you're flattered so, as poor Lizzie used to say."

"I don't know if I am vain," Arthur answered smiling. "I do know I am very grateful to Bride for giving up so much amusement for my sake."

"Sure it's more than I'd do," replied Kathie frankly. "I only wish the days were a week long each of them, there is so much diversion here."

"Bride, you had better go to my lady and explain your intentions; you will get a scolding probably for your folly, but she will be ready enough to chaperone Kathie."

"Oh, indeed, if she is not I don't fancy you'd remain in peaceable possession of Bride, sir. Will I ring, Bride, and send to ask if Lady Rachel is visible?"

"If you were more respectful, Kathie, I would perhaps take you for a ride; I think I shall have one by-and-by," said Arthur.

"Oh, do now, and I'll be a pattern of manners; but have you any horses?"

"Mine are coming up to-day; but probably there's something will do in the stables. Bride, I shall not offer to take you till I know more about the animals."

"Indeed no, I should never dare to ride through the streets," I replied, leaving the room to visit my mother-in-law's apartments.

Lady Rachel was still in bed, but with her hair elaborately dressed, and her cheeks skilfully rouged. She reclined against a pile of down pillows, with her shoulders draped in delicate lace, and her coverlid was of rich blue satin embroidered with crimson flowers.

She had already given audience to *modistes* and many other persons, including, much to my surprise, almost as many men as women, needy poets, and authors, musicians, and others who would play or sing at her next party.

My rustic notions of propriety were somewhat upset, but I concluded it was no concern of mine.

When I arrived she was in deep consultation over some new head-dresses, which the milliner and her maid declared exquisite, but which did not please her. Twenty times, at least, were they tried, and the feathers and flowers changed about.

The maid looked worn and wearied, but went on patiently. Fortunately I had not dressed Kathie for years without getting an

eye for effect, and by good luck made a fresh suggestion which hit my lady's fancy.

She called the others "fools and idiots" for not seeing it sooner, and with a sound rating sent them off.

She was now in high good-humour; her last night's winnings had been considerable, and not only Kathleen but even I had been praised to her, so that we were quite in her best graces, and she declared to take out such a girl as Kathie was a pleasure.

Unfortunately my mission changed her temper, and flying in a violent rage she scolded me roundly, and in no measured language. I had not thought a fine lady would use such terms of abuse; but determined not to lose my temper also, I sat quietly sorting a confused mass of ribbons till she cooled a little.

Finding I would not answer her warmly, she tried to sting me by assuring me my country breeding had shamed Arthur so that he feigned illness rather than be seen with me, and in the same breath declared it was just like him to be so jealous, he could not let me out without him, and so selfish, he must spoil my pleasure because he could not enjoy himself.

This moved me at last, and I said quietly:

"Arthur is really unwell, and as for his being either jealous or selfish, he has too great confidence in me to be the one, and

has used every argument to persuade me to go out, so is certainly not the other."

"Do you mean to try and make me believe you would rather stay with a man who if he is ill will be exacting, rather than take part in such scenes as that of last night? Why, to a country-bred miss like you it must have been fairyland."

"So it was, Lady Rachael, but how could I enjoy such things if I knew Arthur was neglected and lonely?"

"As if a man could not amuse himself; probably it is all a plan to get rid of you, and you are frustrating it by your obstinacy. Arthur has not been such a model of propriety that he cares for a wife to know all his doings. Men are not transformed to saints by wedding."

Thoroughly roused I exclaimed passionately:

"If you choose to speak thus of your son, madam, I will not stand by to hear such things of my husband."

I was going to leave her, but with one of her capricious changes she burst out laughing.

"You would make your fortune on the boards, child. Come back, you need not run and tell Strephon I have been ruffling his Chloe."

"I should not do that, madam. A few warm words do not extinguish my gratitude for your many kind acts to myself and my sister,

and I should be very sorry to make mischief between mother and son."

"Bride, you are a good little thing, and I suppose you are really in love with your husband! a singular taste. I should hardly have thought him capable of inspiring any one with a *grande passion*."

"Though he certainly resembles you, madam, and you have inspired so many."

"You have visited the Blarney Stone, I think, child," said Lady Rachel, mollified as I meant her to be. "I vow Arthur is incomprehensible to me, he seems so tediously in earnest about things. I am thankful he has found some one to keep him from boring me. Come, child, we'll quarrel no more, show me your notes."

She glanced at them, bade me do what I liked; she would take Kathie, who seemed gifted with more spirit than I was, and would be no man's slave, and only stipulated that I must be presented, and attend any royal parties, and the opera after the drawing-room.

She then remembered she had meant Arthur to play the host at some home parties, and was getting warm again, but I undertook that he should do that, and we parted amiably, I promising to drive with her, and to send Kathie to be advised on her dress.

CHAPTER VIII.

> "And certainly they say for fine behaving,
> King Arthur's court has never had its match;
> True point of honour without pride or braving,
> Strict etiquette for ever on the watch."

KATHLEEN ran off with alacrity to take counsel on her wardrobe, and I sat down to the hemming of some dainty lawn ruffles for Arthur's shirts, for I was a good needlewoman and liked it, and while I worked I tried to get my thoughts in order for the letter I should presently write to mother, and wondered what she would think of Kathleen's triumphs.

"Are you regretting your decision, Bride? You look so grave," Arthur said at last.

"Oh, indeed no, I was thinking of Kathleen."

"As a hen meditates who has hatched a duckling which will swim. Kathleen's fairly-launched sweetheart. Never has girl had a greater success for many a year."

"If only it does not spoil her," I said, for I could not bear to think of my lovely impulsive sister, hardening into a heartless woman of the world.

"Better for her to have her time now, free as she is, with the chance of a brilliant marriage, than to have been thrown into the whirl —wedded, for instance, to a poor man like

Geraldyn—and have either been mortified by her inability to join in the swim, or led into debt, or worse, to pay her *modiste*."

"Is Mr. Geraldyn poor?" I said, remembering the magnificence of his mother's dress on the previous night.

"There are several more children, and it is rumoured Lord Geraldyn is seriously embarrassed. His wife is extravagant, and he plays high, and Cecil naturally has followed in their footsteps. I daresay my lady knew of this, hence the warning to Kathie."

"I think it is a difficult world to live in, this London. I am thankful I was not set adrift it," I said.

"No woman in town knows men's position better than Lady Rachel. She will steer Kathie straight for her own credit as a match-maker."

"I should have more faith in your judgment, I think."

"Well, it is easy enough to hear all there is to know of any one she favours, and if I cannot go out to routs I can ride with her, and in the park one can see how the wind blows."

"If only she is as fortunate as I am I shall be thankful."

"That's quite a matter of opinion," said Arthur laughing. "My lady must think you bewitched to overvalue me so."

"Why do you call her 'my lady'?"

"I picked up the fashion as a boy, and she prefers it to being constantly reminded of the

unwelcome existence of a grown-up son! Don't look so shocked, child; I would not speak so of her to any one but you."

"She is at any rate kind to me, and she might have been quite the reverse."

"You are the fashion of the moment, little one, and the success Kathleen had was gratifying. Will you come for a walk, Bride? Probably you will see the King feeding the ducks; the air may mend my headache."

"It is no better now, I am afraid?"

"It gets worse, I think, and I am hot and cold at once. Don't trouble about it, little sweetheart, one is sure to pay a little for loss of blood. Call Kathie, she will like a stroll, and I will visit the stables while you adorn."

We were soon ready, and Arthur took us to St. James' Park, where in the ornamental water swam birds of all varieties.

Fine ladies richly dressed walked daintily to take the air, attended by footmen or little negro pages, who led little lap-dogs, and carried biscuits in case their mistresses took a fancy to throw crumbs to the waterfowl. Many were there whom we had met overnight, Arthur knew almost every one, and we were soon joined by several, among others Lady Geraldyn, who was a dashing highly-rouged handsome blonde. With her were two pretty little girls, who, like Cecil, had their mother's fair hair and blue eyes.

She was specially gracious to me, but I

soon found it was with a view to inquiring somewhat closely about Kathie's adventures with her son, and I had a mind not to be too easily questioned; however, while we talked the children ran up, eagerly crying out:

"Here comes the King!"

Lady Geraldyn would have silenced them, but, glad to turn the conversation, I asked them to tell me which he was, for I had never seen him; an announcement which astonished them much, for he was a familiar object enough to them; but they were very proud to tell me, and also to name the gentlemen with him.

He looked around pleasantly, a stout, good-tempered county gentleman in appearance, having by no means the elegant presence of the Prince of Wales. His eyes fell on Kathleen, who was earnestly regarding him, and we heard him say:

"Eh, eh, who's the pretty girl with cherry ribbons, eh, eh?"

The answer was inaudible, but His Majesty in loud tones went on: "Eh? What? Irish beauty? What? Hasn't been to court, has she? Eh, eh? Why not? Why not?"

I suppose the response was satisfactory, for he nodded familiarly in acknowledgment of Kathie's courtesy, and looked back at her half a dozen times as he trotted along, sometimes stopping to look at some favourite black swan or summer duck.

"In that shepherdess hat and white frock your sister reminds one a little of His Majesty's first love, Lady Sarah Lennox; perhaps he saw the likeness," remarked one of our companions.

It had not entered my ideas, somehow, that kings could do anything so homely as to fall in love like meaner folk, and I suppose my surprise amused my better-informed friends, who proceeded to enlighten me as to the story of how the lovely lady in question had attracted the admiration of the heir to the throne, as in Arcadian fashion she made hay; but his stern, hard mother speedily ended the little romance by providing him with a wife of his own rank, to whom the pretty haymaker was forced to act as bridesmaid.

"And most strange to say, it was himself and not his rank with which she was enamoured," added Lady Geraldyn, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. "She is my cousin once removed, and when I was a mere child I have heard her telling all her woes to my elder sister and crying for him like a baby. I have no patience with such folly!"

"Then he was not very fond of the Queen when they were married?" I ventured to ask.

"My dear, she is virtue and dulness personified. 'Tis the dullest court in the world, and I believe now they are as devoted to each other as two such steady folk are sure to be.

Like the hands of the clock they go the same daily round; up almost before daybreak to go to the dreary cold chapel, the most tedious ceremonies, the stupidest entertainments, little tea-parties, dances for hours to one tune, and then to bed supperless; the Queen and Princesses spending hours at their tambour frames. Oh, 'tis deadly; no wonder in sheer despair the Princes fly the court." Lady Geraldyn stopped with a shrug of the shoulders which expressed as much as her words.

I asked if the Prince of Wales entertained much.

"Oh yes, Florizel has pretty notions, Mrs. Gordon; while the King was in seclusion he made the public money fly, I warrant me. 'Tis rumoured there will soon be another *fête* at Carlton House; you are sure to be invited, and so is your sister."

"The Princess is not there?"

"Oh la no, my dear soul; Florizel and she agree to differ. She is a good-natured, bouncing creature, but so monstrously slovenly and coarse, he cannot put up with it."

"You knew Versailles well, Lady Geraldyn, I think?" said a young gentleman who had joined us.

"My dear Beauchamp, it is a misfortune for all you boys that you cannot remember those times as I do. Ah! how one amused

oneself there. The *fêtes* at Trianon, the lovely, gracious Queen, the brilliancy of the court. Ah! *mon Dieu*, to think of it all ending thus!"

Lady Geraldyn spoke passionately, and as her blue eyes flashed she grew still more like her son. She went on:

"I have visited every court in Europe, but none came up to that, though the Russians have a barbaric splendour too. Here one exists somehow, however."

"Had you good cards last night?" asked Mr. Beauchamp.

"I lost two hundred guineas in ten minutes, the deuce was in my luck. Were you at Arthur's or White's last night? What did Geraldyn do? He was in horrible humour to-day—so lost, of course."

"I believe he did lose over a thousand," the gentleman said reluctantly.

"No wonder he swore at us all, and boxed little Rosie's ears," said the lady coolly.

Not caring to hear more of her private affairs, though indeed they seemed no secret, I loitered talking to the two pretty little girls, who reminded me of Mollie though she never went so smartly dressed, and waited till Kathie caught me up; she was with some other girls, and we all chatted pleasantly till it was time to go home.

Lady Rachel carried me off to numerous shops and an auction, where many fine folk

were bidding what seemed to my rustic ignorance enormous sums for ugly china monsters, jewelled snuff-boxes, and such things. Lady Rachel bid for many articles and spent a handful of gold, though I wondered where she would find room for more ornaments in her apartments. After the auction we drove to many grand houses, sometimes entering to sip chocolate but more often only leaving cards.

It all amused me very much at first, but after a while it grew tiresome, one heard the same bit of scandal repeated so often, and not knowing the characters concerned it had no great interest to me. Perhaps had they been intimate friends I should have relished it more, but I was very glad when our last visit was paid and the horses' heads turned to the Park, where we found many carriages driving and some ladies strolling with their beaux. Lady Rachel, who knew every one, told me many amusing stories of them all, and bade me remember all the information about their family matters and intrigues, otherwise I should look so stupid in society, for what else was there to talk of worth opening one's lips for ?

CHAPTER IX.

"As she fled fast thro' sun and shade,
The happy winds upon her played,
Blowing the ringlet from the braid.
She looked so lovely as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips."

It was a gay, pretty scene and I was much interested in it all.

The prancing horses, the coachmen and footmen with wigs and big nosegays, and the gilt sedan chairs with their liveried bearers, all made such a novel sight that I was sorry when a number of gentlemen found us out and we had to listen to their fine speeches.

Presently our host of last night came up, red-faced and smiling. He said Kathleen was in the Ride, quite beset, and tried to persuade Lady Rachel to take a turn there on foot. She declined, but when he said he must go to walk off an impending fit of gout, she remarked:

"Mrs. Gordon is fond of exercise, and having been separated from the *cher mari* for at least two hours, pines, I am sure, to see him."

The duke, with a sweeping bow, replied good-naturedly:

"Arthur is indeed a fortunate man, and I shall be equally so if Mrs. Gordon deigns to

accept my escort, and does not scorn my grey hairs and mature age."

"Oh, sir, maturity implies perfection," I answered smiling, and glad to go, for his formal compliments reminded me so of uncle that I felt at my ease with him, and we chatted merrily until at last he pointed up the Ride to a group on horseback, and I recognized Arthur sitting slightly apart on a great black horse, while Kathie, mounted on a fretting, showy chestnut, was laughing with no less a person than his Royal Highness, another jolly, red-faced, noisy young man joining in the conversation and garnishing every speech with oaths, in which, indeed, he differed little from many more.

"That is the Duke of Clarence, the sailor Prince," whispered my companion.

Several gentlemen were in attendance on the Princes, all of whom seemed to know the Duke of Portishead, and a few with whom I had danced took off their hats to me, as did the Prince of Wales.

Kathleen, little caring for ceremony, turned to the rail and held out her hand to the duke, interrupting her conversation with the royal brothers to speak to him.

"Ah, sir, your ball had but one sad fault," she said in return for a compliment on her looks after such late hours.

"Indeed, and what was that?" said the old gentleman.

"That it came to an end," she replied laughing. She seemed inclined to continue talking to him, but better versed in etiquette, the duke turned away and spoke to Arthur, leaving Kathleen free to resume her former conversation.

Her horse seemed an uneasy creature, and now and then lashed out sharply or gave a jump.

"Where did you get that brute, Arthur?" said the duke. "It's not fit for any lady to ride, man."

"Not fit for *any* lady, perhaps, but safe enough for this one; she can ride anything."

"Well, well, why did you not come round to me? I would have found you a better mount. Come to-morrow, mind. Bless me, look there!"

The chestnut bucked rather sharply, but Kathie seemed quite undisturbed. Arthur thanked the duke, and said he would be glad to get a pleasanter animal for one day, as his own would hardly be fit after their journey. They went on discussing horses; but I tried to listen to Kathie's conversation; but could tell the horse's restlessness was rather convenient, as it kept the Duke of Clarence's somewhat noisy familiarity in check, and early as it was in the afternoon, it was clear he had already had his share of wine.

I suppose Arthur guessed this also, for I caught an amused look once or twice, and at

length the chestnut lashed out within an inch of the Prince's horse, and reared up straight. The Duke of Clarence made a snatch at the reins, but so unsteadily he nearly rolled off his own horse, and Arthur with a quick, dexterous move interposed himself between the chestnut and the other gentlemen, whose interference might be more dangerous than the horse's restlessness, for Kathleen was steady in her seat, and quite mistress of the animal, which Arthur recognizing did not meddle further.

"Sure it's nothing," she cried gaily, as her horse's forelegs touched the ground again. "I'll just have a gallop to steady him; come, Arthur."

"At your service," he replied, but holding back to see if the Princes wished to accompany her.

"Come on, George, a dozen of champagne on it, but I am up with her first," shouted the jolly sailor Prince, and off he raced in pursuit with some other gentlemen in a reckless fashion that would have scared many horses.

The Prince of Wales seeing the risk called out to his brother, and my companion, much excited, poured out a string of ejaculations not unmixed with oaths; but knowing how sure a seat Kathie had, I was not alarmed, and the chestnut was not really vicious; so in a minute or two they were all steadied

down to a more decorous pace. For the Ride was now filling, and it was not safe to ride at speed.

Enforcing his statement with strong language, the Prince declared Kathleen's riding as unequalled as her other charms, and asked me where she had learnt.

I told him she had ridden since she was a baby almost, and after one or two more polite speeches he rode off. And I bethought myself that Lady Rachel might be vexed if I did not return to her, so we strolled back, and the good-natured old duke stayed chatting with me for a while, by the carriage, which pleased Lady Rachel.

And she informed me as we drove home that she had been mistaken in me; and though I had neither Kathleen's beauty nor spirit, I was not the insignificant chit she had thought; but if I would but encourage the fellows, might have a fair success, for some liked the soft, tender style.

I knew by now it was useless to explain that I cared nothing for admiration, though I like to laugh and talk, as is natural; so I listened in silence.

When we reached the house, I had hardly gone to my own apartments when I was sent for to Lady Rachel's in haste, and there found her raging and storming like a beautiful fury. Her maid stood frightened and weeping, and after some time I learnt that she had put the

wrong ribbons on Lady Rachel's dress, and there was no time to change them.

Such words as were used to the poor girl I could hardly repeat, but determined if possible to stop the outbreak, I said I was a fair needlewoman, and could change the ribbons while Lady Rachel dressed. This turned the tide a little. Boxing the maid's ears sharply, Lady Rachel abused me next for not joining in the outcry at the "creature's" stupidity, and then railed at me for being so common as to know how to sew. I felt inclined to leave her to her tantrums, but the maid's imploring looks checked me, and she could hardly box my ears, so I took the dress, and matching it from some ribbons on the table, asked her to decide what she would have used.

Rather sulkily she made a choice, and I set to with a will; she railed on at her maid, but less violently, and finally, I believe from real exhaustion, was quiet. I was but half through my task when a message came that our dinner was ready. But I bade the others not wait, and finished in time for Lady Rachel to be ready when her chair came; so she went to her dinner-party in better humour and the poor maid thanked me tearfully.

I expected to find Arthur in the dining-room, but the footman was clearing the table, and Jervis told me Mr. Gordon believed I had gone with Lady Rachel and had not sat out

dinner, appearing indisposed, but spoke of going to his club shortly. It flashed through my mind that Jervis, having been Colonel Gordon's body-servant, fancied I was going to neglect my husband also for the pleasures of society, for he looked as if he would like to say more but for respect. However, the first thing was to find Arthur if he were in the house. I ran up to our sitting-room, which looked untidy and forlorn, books, papers, and cushions strewed round the sofa on which Arthur lay so deep in thought that my touch startled him, and he exclaimed :

"Bride! Why, that imp of a page said you were finishing dressing in my lady's room and would dine out."

"The message I sent was, finishing a dress and would dine late."

"If I had not been a fool, Bride, I should have guessed there was a mistake ; but I am in the blues to-night, I believe, so thought my lady had over-persuaded you, and was keeping you in her rooms to avoid me."

Arthur was so evidently in the depressed, weary stage common after slight fever, that I could not be vexed at his so easily believing I could desert him for the sake of gaieties, which I really cared not much about.

Instead of reproaching him, it was obviously more to the purpose to settle his scattered cushions comfortably, and after one or two attempts he said :

"Thank you, dear, that is better than I have been all day."

"I suppose, as Larry described himself once, you have toothache in all your bones, and more of them than usual?"

"He hit it off exactly," Arthur replied smiling. "What a deft little woman you are, sweetheart; the room looks a different place now you have been here five minutes."

I was tidying the litter of books and other things, and he bethought himself of asking what had kept me from dinner. I tried to say as little as might be, but he had been too often witness of such scenes, and his face darkened as he said angrily:

"I never thought what you were exposed to, Bride, or I should have fetched you away; I will not have you thus put upon."

Privately I was thankful the two strong wills and hot tempers had not clashed; but it is as well not to tell the men all one thinks, so I only laughed at his fancying me overtasked by sewing on a few knots of ribbon, and ran off to change my dress.

CHAPTER X.

"Then dress, then dinner, then awakes the world!
Then glare the lamps, then whirl the wheels, then roar
Through street and square fast flashing chariots, hurled
Like harnessed meteors; then along the floor
Chalk mimics paintings, then festoons are twirled,
Then roll the brazen thunders of the doors
Which open to the thousand happy few
The earthly paradise of 'Or Molu.'"

I PUT on a pretty fresh muslin, knowing a man is often unconsciously fretted when unwell by anything out in his surroundings, and it was not wasted, for Arthur noticed it at once, and told me I had made an impression on the Duke of Portishead, who vowed I was finished off as daintily as one of Bouché's miniatures.

"I shall like him better than ever," I said amused, for I never thought much of my own looks, wishing to be tall and stately as Kathie promised to be when older.

She came down dressed for her parties by the time I had dined, for she was to join Lady Rachel later, not being invited to the dinner-party.

"Been on the war-path, Kathleen, and brought back trophies?" Arthur remarked, seeing her hands full of lovely flowers and little notes.

"Oh, you can interest yourself in the world

once more, sir," said Kathie saucily. "All dinner-time you were as glum as if you were at your own wake and couldn't pay for the whiskey. I knew Bride had not the spirit to take French leave."

"You did your best to make me believe it anyhow, miss."

"Sure I had not the bad manners to pretend to know a man's wife better than he did himself, and after the lecture you gave me on behaving prettily."

"I only told you Princes were not usually treated quite so cavalierly."

"Oh, I but just told the Duke of Clarence I liked compliments paid me softly, not in a ship-ahoy, in a high-wind tone of voice, that might be heard half a mile off; was there any harm in that?"

"It must have been a novelty to him, considering how ladies usually try to extort these same pretty speeches."

"Ah, well, I think they are as nice from any one else, so tastes differ. Is Lord Headland a poet?"

"A poet? no, what put that in your head?"

"Oh, I see! Verses and white flowers, both ordered at the same shop probably, or else there are plenty out-of-elbows scamps ready to versify for half a guinea."

"My gratitude for his mental efforts need not be overwhelming, then? Who writes the prose?"

"If the writing's doubtful, and spelling worse, they're probably original, otherwise one pays so much a page."

"Is that the way you managed, Arthur?" I asked laughing.

"To be sure it was. Do you think I could put rhymes together? I remember just before I went abroad, Headland and I were smitten with two sisters, and unknowingly ordered verses of the same fellow. What does he do, but give us each the same, only changing the name, and the ladies showed them to each other."

"What a catastrophe! I hope your letters to me did not cost you much per sheet."

"I managed those myself, by aid of a complete letter-writer, dear. Kathleen, are you going to adorn yourself with all those tributes of admiration?"

"I should be a species of Jack-in-the-Green! Bride, dear, put me some in my hair, will you? no one arranges them so well."

"Be impartial, Bride, take a sprig from each," said Arthur, "then she can assure each swain she is wearing his flowers."

"I shall carry Lord Headland's in my hand," Kathleen remarked with a slight blush. "Do what you like with the rest, Bride, they will do for the vases."

I fastened some roses in her hair and at her breast. She was wearing a soft silky white dress, very plainly made, which set off her

charms perhaps even better than the fineries of last night.

Her chair was announced just as I had arranged her flowers.

"Good-night, Bride, I wish you were coming with me," she said with a loving kiss, as I wrapped her mantle over her white shoulders.

"Good-night, Arthur; ah, don't disturb yourself, I know you're feeling bad to-night."

"I must be a great deal worse before I forego my privilege of attending a lady to her chair," he answered, offering her his arm, for in the days of which I write the manners were very different to those now prevalent, and ladies received far more courteous consideration than they seem to expect now; possibly their own manners were more dignified, and thus they exacted greater respect.

A sedan chair was surely the ideal conveyance for a lady, who entering it in her own hall, was taken into another house, thus avoiding cold draughts, an inevitable risk in descending from or returning to a coach.

Kathleen had of course never been in one before, and was much amused.

"I shall feel like the four-and-twenty blackbirds all in a pie," she said, as she was shut in.

"You'll be a dainty dish to set before the King, if he happens to be at the assembly,"

I returned, as her bearers lifted the sedan, and went off down the steps, the footman in authoritative tones calling out, "To the Honourable Mrs. Beauchamp's, Cavendish Square."

"Will they dance?" I asked, "or what other amusement will there be? Gambling and flirting, a little music and singing. Where else is she to go? that is rather a stupid house."

I named two other houses.

Arthur remarked they might dance at one, the other would be chiefly for cards.

"But I suppose Kathie plays and loses?"

"My dear child, a pretty girl never loses. Some fellow always banks with her, she'll get her winnings, and he'll stand the losses."

I suppose I looked doubtful, for Arthur went on kindly:

"Take my advice, dear; whatever Kathie may do, don't scold her, or you will prevent her confiding in you, and so lose your influence; she is going to all extremes, or I am no judge of women."

"What do you mean? I feel quite adrift," I said.

"No great harm," he answered smiling; "she will be immensely admired, flattered, toasted, and entertained. Her natural love of excitement will probably carry her all lengths in gambling, coquetting, and plunging into every available dissipation."

"How will it all end?" I sighed, not liking his description.

"Either in a grand marriage, or in her getting tired of it all. Don't look so troubled, Bride. Kathleen and yourself are very different; the life that contents you would weary her to death; but I see she has a pretty good foundation of sense for ballast, so do not fear for her, it would not be human nature if her head were not a little turned with so much flattery."

I did not feel contented; but there was nothing to be done. So I gathered up the discarded flowers, and put them in water, and put away the notes which careless Kathie had left for any one to read who chose.

"Some of these days she will be more choice over her *billets doux;* just now one man is as good as another," Arthur remarked. "Did you leave my letters about so, Bride?"

"Not generally," I answered blushing, for indeed I had embroidered a little satin case for them, and kept them hidden with a few other treasures, and I have them still.

I had longed to ask him a question all day but had not felt bold enough. However, at last I summoned courage to say shyly:

"Arthur, now you have returned to your own world, and compared me to the women in it—are you satisfied with me?"

I had meant to word it better, but broke off awkwardly, and felt my face burning with

blushes. Arthur noted my confusion with a smile, and made no answer for a minute, then he said:

"You fall short in many points, Bride, and are by no means yet a woman of fashion."

"I will try to improve, if you will tell me what to do," I answered humbly, feeling my secret fears confirmed.

"Well, then, you must paint your face at least half an inch thick, and stiffen your lips with red enamel, buy twice as many dresses and fallals as you can pay for, be in debt all over the town, gamble away half your husband's income, and box your maid's ears when your losses are heavy; sulk and have the vapour if you are obliged to be at home a day, but be perfectly charming when you are abroad; sacrifice everybody and everything, including your own reputation, to gratify your greed for pleasure, luxury, and excitement, and above all things, my dear, give up the habit of paying any attention to your husband's tastes or wishes."

Much relieved to find him only jesting, I replied:

"If these changes meet your views, I will try to effect them; but seriously, tell me anything to mend. I know I am but rustic in my ways, though mother took such pains with me."

"Seriously, sweetheart," Arthur said, "I expected to find you bashful and at a loss

last night, as you were so shy with Lady Rachel, and I meant to stay by you, at risk of being laughed at for jealousy or over-fondness, but I saw you were quite at your ease at once."

"I forgot myself altogether, there was so much to think of and look at——"

"That you did not realize how much you were being inspected in return; but I can assure you I was complimented on my good fortune. Ah, I had forgotten I have some jewels for you."

He drew some old leather cases from under the sofa-cushions.

"My lawyer sent these to me to-day. I did not remember their existence."

I opened them, and exclaimed with admiration at the sheen of diamonds.

"You will have brilliants after all, Bride, without taking them from my lady. An old aunt left me these for my wife; I was about seven at the time, and had just married Flora Geraldyn with the curtain-ring, and she cried bitterly for these, and I stamped with rage because they were taken away, and vowed she was my wife, and should have them."

They were fine stones but very lightly set, so not too large even for me; Arthur pronounced them becoming, and remarked that he had heard his aunt was a slight fairy of a woman.

"She married some far-away kinsman of

Lord Geraldyn's," he added. "Talking of them reminds me. Did you see Lady Geraldyn driving a coach and four this afternoon?"

"Indeed, no; I wish I had."

"Oh, she often does, but she was late in the Park to-day. There is little she has not done. I fancy her husband is a good-looking, heavy fellow, and her talents have pushed him into many good appointments. They have lived all over Europe, and it is said she has hunted, shot, and fought duels; I believe spending half her time in men's clothes, and going through most wild adventures, but always in her maddest escapades making men respect her. She told me she had been in every court of Europe, and this was the dullest."

"Ah, Geraldyn has some court appointment, so she must conform to rule, and certainly there is a tedious amount of decorum and ceremony to go through, and small diversion, as Larry would say. I hear they gamble higher than ever; Geraldyn lost heavily yesterday."

I repeated the conversation in the Park, and Arthur remarked:

"I have played cards through breakfast at their house, and I've seen little Rosie and Joan gambling for sweets before they could talk plain, and Joan, who is fiery, used to dash her cards in Rosie's face if they were bad."

"Fancy Mollie gambling!"

"Mollie with her big blue eyes playing brag with her kitten would be a droll sight. All the same, Lady Geraldyn is very fond of her children, and was very kind to me when I was a boy."

We talked in desultory fashion of various people for an hour or more. Arthur was disinclined for any other occupation, and sometimes lay silent, half-asleep, and weary.

In one of these pauses we were suddenly startled by a violent knocking at the hall door and noise of voices.

"One would think we were besieged again," Arthur said. "What on earth is it, Jervis?"

"Some gentlemen are below, sir, and insist on seeing you."

"Confound them, who are they?"

Jervis ran through a string of names.

Arthur said shortly in reply, "Are they drunk or sober?"

"They appear to have dined, sir," answered the butler.

"Oh, I understand. Bride, dear, may I request you to leave the room?"

I went to my bedroom, and having a mind to see them pass left the door ajar. Up they came, shouting, laughing, and swearing all together.

Evidently they had dined and were more or less excited with wine. One handsome fair boy was decidedly half tipsy, and reeled as he walked, and most of them had their lace

cravats awry, or their fine embroidered waistcoats buttoned crooked.

There was a regular view hollo as they saw Arthur, with shouts of "The malingerer!" "We'll smoke him," and other phrases, which in the babel of voices I did not catch; then the door was slammed, but presently reopened, and there were shouts for wine and brandy, which were brought.

Then a sweet, cultivated, but rather unsteady tenor voice trolled out a song of which I heard this scrap only:

> "For we'll drink, drink, drink,
> And we'll clink, clink, clink,
> Our glasses in a merry, merry tune,
> To women, wine, and wassail,
> He who scorns to be a vassal,
> Knows not how best to use his life's brief noon."

A rattling chorus followed, in which all the voices joined more or less in tune, for the best of ears for music may be drowned in wine.

The noise went on again, varied by more songs for some time, then I heard the revellers depart with noisy good-nights, and I went back to the room, which was now redolent of tobacco and brandy.

The servants were removing the glasses and opening the windows.

"I'll see no more visitors of that sort tonight," Arthur said to Jervis. "Tell the next lot anything you like, but keep them out."

"Certainly, sir," replied Jervis retiring, and Arthur went on to me:

"They were anxious to drag me out with them, and I had some trouble to convince them I did not choose to go. They fancied you were out, and wanted me to go and make a night of it, badger-baiting, boxing, visiting the actresses at Drury Lane, knocking down a Charlie or two, and generally playing the fool; probably ending up with getting rooked in some gambling hell, and coming home drunk."

"Did you ever do such things?" I asked wondering.

"When I was younger I have done like the rest, child; but I never had a real liking for that sort of rowdyism, and an old saying of my father's stuck by me always."

"What was it?"

"'Don't let the acts of your youth shame your manhood, or be such as you'll regret when you look in your wife's face.'"

"Your father thought a good deal of your marrying," I said shyly.

"He held it usually made or marred a man; I think he would be content with my choice, Bride."

"Will you see Dr. Probyn, sir?" asked Jervis reappearing.

I wished the worthy man anywhere else, but Arthur could scarcely say he was not well enough to see his doctor, so up he came, and bowing to me said:

"In you, madam, I behold the eighth wonder of the world."

"How so, sir?" I asked.

"For a woman of fashion to teach a man sense instead of folly is so incredible that I felt bound to verify the fact."

"Perhaps it proves I am not a lady of fashion," I returned smiling.

"Then commend me to rustic charms if they combine such wisdom. I have just been feasting my eyes on Miss Kavanagh."

"I say, doctor, that is strong language," exclaimed Arthur; "are you going to become a victim? Excuse my want of politeness in not rising."

"I've seen you on the broad of your back before now," replied the doctor curtly, slipping his fingers quickly from Arthur's hand to his wrist, and keeping them there as he went on, "*In re* Miss Kavanagh, I presume there is no law against my admiring a fine woman, who is not ashamed to show her fair skin just as God gave it her, instead of raddling it over with red and white poison like a newly-ochred sheep's back."

The doctor paused, looked at his watch, and soliloquized, "He has been overtaxing nature and got a slap in the face from her; serve him right."

Well accustomed to his peculiarities Arthur remarked:

"Is that your opinion of me, doctor?"

"Of you, sir? I was speaking of your sister-in-law. You do not call yourself a fine

woman, do you? You have got a relapse of fever, Gordon; sharpish attack too."

"You may as well tell me Queen Anne is dead, doctor, at once; I have known that to my cost all day."

"Eh? Perhaps as you are so smart, then, you know how to get rid of it, for you'll be wanted pretty soon."

"Why, what's the news? Anything fresh?" cried Arthur eagerly.

"We're likely to cross the water pretty soon, probably."

"To France? A brush with Bony? What luck!"

"Thought I'd take him in," ejaculated the doctor in an aside. "Try again, man, or perhaps Mrs. Gordon may make a better guess."

"You surely do not mean we are to return to Ireland?"

"She's hit it," cried the doctor, continuing with the formal politeness he assumed to me sometimes, "Madam, you have read my meaning with great acuteness."

"But why? When? Are you not off to Wadhurst? Come, don't tantalize a fellow so," Arthur exclaimed.

The doctor was not to be hurried, but explained with many asides and a good deal of strong language that the regiment's move to Wadhurst was countermanded, and they were to lie in readiness for marching orders

at short notice for Dublin, as there were rumours of disaffection in the north of Ireland. But the doctor added:

"I have a letter from a large landowner there discrediting the reports."

"Don't put too much faith in that," said Arthur. "Mr. Kavanagh and others who knew County Wexford well were slow to open their eyes to the state of things."

"Have you any knowledge of the north, Mrs. Gordon?"

"My father's cousin is Bishop of Killala and I know him and his family but have never visited them; my brothers have more than once."

"Well, he will hardly be in it, and Killala Bay is an unlikely place, for it is very inaccessible."

"Unless the French come again," remarked Arthur; "probably their hands are full, though."

Jervis entered with the supper-tray, and our talk drifted to other topics, till the doctor left after playing a game or two of chess with me, in which I won his favour by checkmating him once, for Uncle George had taken pains to teach me, being a fine player himself. He bade Arthur abstain from violent exertion or late hours, and lead a sober, regular life as befitted a married man, by which with a febrifuge of Jesuits' bark he would quickly recover, and as a last soliloquy remarked:

"She'll keep him to it; the smaller the woman the greater the hold on these long-bodied fools."

"Complimentary," said Arthur laughing, as the door closed on the last words. "The doctor being small himself maintains length of limb detracts from brains, because the wits are weakened by extending over so large a surface."

"What a wonderful theory."

"Yes, he is a man of crotchets, but skilful in his profession, and tender as a woman to any one really suffering."

"Does he really not know when he soliloquizes?"

"I fancy not; sometimes one cannot help suspecting it's a way of giving a hint, though."

CHAPTER XI.

"She's the most distressful country
That ever yet was seen,
For they're hanging men and women too
For the wearin' of the green."

ARTHUR'S predictions about Kathleen seemed in a fair way to be fulfilled.

Day after day her life was now one unceasing round of gaiety; she was feted, toasted, flattered in every possible fashion.

It was all such novelty to her, coming from the quiet home-life of Ballydorough, that no wonder she exulted in her triumph, for she was now acknowledged to be the reigning beauty of the town, and dressed under the direction and supervision of Lady Rachel's perfect taste, she was indeed a very vision of loveliness; her delicate peach-like bloom shaming all cosmetics, and never losing its bright tints for all her late hours, and the eagerness with which she entered into each fresh scheme for pleasure, scorning to conceal her enjoyment under a modish languor, and charming all the more by her freshness.

My share of gaiety was very much quieter and less; but I did not regret that I had not the brilliant, daring spirit to carry me through untried paths; and though by my

natural quietness I escaped any great breaches of etiquette, I often felt shy and at a loss when carried to some entertainment by Lady Rachel.

Arthur's indisposition lasted longer than from his strength might have been expected; but he had too much taxed his constitution by over-exertion so soon after his severe wounds, and had a good deal to make up.

He had his tilbury in town, and we spent many hours in long drives, down to Richmond, and even as far as Windsor, to see the castle and the broad terrace where the townspeople walked to see the King and Queen taking their airing, with the pretty Princesses around them; or sometimes we went into the leafy dells of Epping Forest, or over Hampstead Heath. There were plenty of pretty country drives within easy reach then, and the fresh air and quiet suited Arthur better than hot assemblies, auctions, or even the park, where he had to be constantly exerting himself to talk.

He still, however, contrived to arrange a ride with Kathie very frequently, and among all her crowd of admirers declared that Lord Headland and a very rich baronet were distancing the rest.

Lady Rachel was very proud of Kathleen's sudden success, openly declared she would grace the strawberry-leaves, and was, I think, rather glad that I remained so much at home,

as she carried matters in her own fashion with no interference, though I doubt if I should have offered any, and Arthur maintained his opinion it was best to let matters take their course. And I think he was right. Kathie's nature was never one to brook the curb, and if I could not sympathize with her new unconcealed passion for excitement and luxury in every shape, at least I could interest myself in all that concerned her, and so nothing checked her confidences or chilled the warm love between us.

Day by day she poured out the tale of her gay doings, laughing at most of her admirers, but not saying much of Lord Headland; and though it was clear she was proud of his marked attentions, somehow I never detected any of the little signs with which love is apt to betray itself.

We had been presented at court, after due instruction in courtesies from a posture-mistress, and had duly attended the opera after, in our tall nodding court plumes; and the next day I had been out with Lady Rachel, paying visits, while Arthur went to arrange about the purchase-money for his step in the regiment. On our return to the house several guests arrived, and as I was doing my best to assist in entertaining them, Jervis in handing the chocolate whispered that Mr. Gordon wished to see me at my earliest leisure.

"Nothing wrong?" I asked anxiously.

"No, madam, he seems better than usual," returned the worthy butler, who was much attached to my husband.

I remained a little longer till some of the visitors had taken leave, and only a few special friends remained, who were discussing a choice new scandal under their breath with my mother-in-law. I was evidently not wanted and slipped out of the room.

There was a sound of voices and laughter in our apartment, and entering I found Arthur with a most unexpected companion, namely, my brother Larry.

I stood in amazement as Larry started up, and gave me a brotherly hug, then holding me at arm's length exclaimed:

"Sure, Bride, I'd never have known you if we'd met outside. Why, you are grown into a lady, and quite good-looking too; who'd have belaved it?"

"Be hanged to your impudence, Larry," said Arthur. "My wife, sir, was always charming."

"Wait till you see Kathleen, Larry, if you think me a fine lady," I said laughing. "She's the toast of London."

"Ah, be done with your nonsense, child, you should not fib like that."

"It's perfectly correct, Master Larry," replied Arthur; "the clubs have elected her as such."

Larry opened his eyes widely in utter amazement and burst out laughing.

"Oh, did one ever hear the like of that, now? Have they nothing better to look at than that slip of a girl? Why, it's but the other day she was hanging head down from the Kerry pippin tree, for her foot slipped, and she as mad as could be lest you were coming along, Arthur. Ah, where is she now?"

"Gone on the Duke of Portishead's coach to eat maids of honour at Richmond."

"Sure do you think I'm green enough to swallow that, Arthur? Is she turned cannibal?"

Arthur laughed too much to speak, so I explained it was only a name for a kind of cheesecake, and then inquired how Larry had managed to get to London so much quicker than we had thought likely.

"Ah, by good luck. The old chief took it in his head it would be the making of me to serve with such a model brother-in-law, and you know he was in full power over the fox-hunters, so let me off sharp."

Of course Larry had been home for a day or two, and had lots of news for me. Walter and Eveleen were in their own house, and mother had been too busy helping them to miss us as much as she otherwise would.

Uncle was coming to London and might appear any day, though Larry vowed he would not present himself till he had re-

modelled his wardrobe, and might be in town for days before he was seen.

"Would you believe in Larry's proprieties?" Arthur said. "He has engaged a room at a coffee-house, and left his goods there."

"Well, didn't uncle lecture me enough as to not intruding myself on Lady Rachel? As if I'd no more manners than a Connaught pig. If she asks me here, sure I'll come; but if not, well and good."

"Were you sorry to leave the foxhunters?" I asked.

"Sorry enough to say good-bye to all the fellows and the chief; but sick as a dog of the work at last."

"Do you think you're come to us to play?"

"Ah, not at all; sure I'd fight the French with the greatest pleasure in life, for I wouldn't mind cutting a fellow down when I did not know what he said, but it makes one feel queer to be on duty when a poor beggar's hung that you've known all your life, and hunted, shot, and visited with."

"Were you at the executions?"

"Aye, the turn fell to me, worse luck, and I had to see poor Vesey Colclough turned off; some of us had to keep the guard."

"Did he see you, Larry?"

"He did, he just nodded, and said 'good-bye' with his old cheery voice and smile, and you may laugh if you choose, Arthur, but I could have cried like a girl."

"Indeed, I can believe it," said Arthur kindly. "One could hardly have to face a worse trial. Did you have to see any more such work?"

"Only poor old Grogan, and I did not really know him well, but it was bad enough; the poor old man was nearly carried to the place, he was too ill to stand, but he died like a man."

"And poor Bagenal Harvey?" I said sadly, for we had been good friends.

"Some said he showed the white feather; but I believe the real truth was he was very ill. All their heads are upon Wexford court-house, and Keogh's is not changed one bit, just as he looked alive; the rest you cannot distinguish."

"That's enough horrors," said Arthur hastily, for I suppose I looked pale and he noticed it. "Is the country quiet?"

"Fairly so. Sam O'Connor's off heading a lot of fellows between freelances and highwaymen; they are up in the mountains and come down and plunder."

"Mr. Walker?"

"Died in prison, thank goodness, or he must have been hung, which would have been bad for Eveleen and Walter. Oh, Bride! the O'Haras were kept sixteen days in the prison ships by the rebels, and it has driven Mrs. O'Hara out of her mind."

"Not really? Will she not recover?"

"Heaven knows! they were all huddled in the hold of a smack, lying on the ballast, hardly any food fit to eat, and what with the insults, threats of death, and bullying, she went raving mad and tried to commit suicide to get out of it all."

"Teddy was one of you, was he not?"

"Oh, aye, he's all well enough."

"What about the country generally, Larry?" asked Arthur. "Is it fairly quiet, think you?"

"That's a queer question to answer. I fancy in Wexford the flame burnt out; the worst of it is the yeomen did splendid work and were thoroughly loyal, but they're behaving very harshly and cruelly now."

"That's a pity; but it's almost inevitable with civil war; there's so much personal feeling in the matter, and private revenge is taken under a pretence of public justice."

"You know about the Ulster business, of course, Gordon?"

"The battles of Antrim, Saintfield, and Ballynahinch we heard of."

"At Antrim a troop of the 22nd dragoons made a fine charge, but they undervalued the rebel force and got badly cut to pieces and Lord O'Neil was dragged down and piked."

"The rebels got the worst of it in the end?"

"Yes; a handful of yeomanry, a few regulars, and a couple of officers made a

dashing sally, got the guns, and did good work; and then another reinforcement came up from Blaris Camp, and rumours of another still scared the rebels, and they ran."

"Badly officered, no doubt."

"That's it. They were no fools when they tried to catch you, Arthur. A man who had seen service would have been valuable."

"The Saintfield affair was a surprise, was it not?"

"The York Fencibles under Stapleton got into a road with high banks and fell into an ambuscade there, and if Stapleton had not been a cool fellow there would have been a worse mess, but he forced his way into the open."

"Who were really victorious?"

"Drawn game; both sides say they had the best of it, I believe. At Ballynahinch the regulars had an escape. Monro had them right in his hand, dead beat, after a forced march; a night attack would have turned the scale.

"How came he to let such a chance slip?"

"Oh, the old story, too many cooks spoilt the broth; the leaders could not agree, and before they were of one mind the opportunity was lost and the soldiers under arms."

"There was a bit of a skirmish at Cork while Wexford was up, was there not? Walter got some news of it."

"Oh yes, one or two trifles of fighting, hardly worth the name. Are you clear at all about the progress of the whole affair, Arthur?"

"Not specially."

"Sure it's small blame to you. It's a tangled skein of flax, and I'm not over-sure if I'll make you sensible. First, you know, the Dutch and French have had a small try at an invasion."

"Yes, both failures. Then I suppose the two religious parties have had an undying feud?"

"Yes, that's always kept up; a sort of smothered fire. The Catholics were bitter at being excluded from civil rights, you see; so there was never real peace."

"Lord Edward Fitzgerald was the next to stir up a row in Dublin; he was a spirited, handsome, romantic sort of fellow, and had great influence."

"Uncle knew him very well," I said, "and always declared but for his imprudence and self-will the conspiracy might have been serious, but he was so reckless he spoilt the whole plot, luckily."

"Yes, and was caught in consequence, and died of wounds in jail; but there was an uprising and a good many small encounters came off."

"Was there not some catastrophe rather like the Scullabogue business?" asked Arthur.

"I heard Walter and your mother discuss it one night while I was ill."

"Oh, you mean the barracks at Prosperous, county Dublin? The captain, Swayne, was a credulous fool and got thick with Esmond, a man of some standing, who sold him like a sheep, made him believe the people would give up their arms if they could come under cover of darkness; instead of which a great body surrounded the barracks, set them on fire, and kept the men in till they were burnt."

"Your countrymen have pretty notions of brutality, I think, Larry."

"Well, I'm out of Ireland now, so I don't mind saying there have been faults both sides. There has been a powerful lot of unnecessary flogging, imprisoning, pitch cap, and what not on our side."

"I thought that invention of Satan, the pitch cap, was of rebel origin."

"Sure I'm afraid not at all. 'Tis said the North Cork regiment started it, but I don't know; both sides have used it."

"Well, go on, Larry."

"At Ballymone, Captain Beevor had only forty men with him. He was attacked in bed; but with Patrickson and Masswell, the other officers, and his handful of men, he actually got the best of it. After Dunbain they suspected thirty yeomen of disaffection, and shot them then and there."

"Serve them right," said Arthur coolly,

for he was a thorough soldier, and deemed the offence unpardonable, and perhaps it was; though the punishment seems terribly wholesale and sudden.

"Well, then, at Limerick the coaches were stopped after the fashion you two probably understand," said Larry smiling. "There were plenty of murders, especially at Rathangan; several gentlemen were killed there, Mr. Spenser and others who had been promised protection, and their wives looking on; but all the same the women here and there hid men till the rebels were gone."

"Do you mean the Roman Catholic women?"

"Yes; some turned to fiends, and were worse than the men—but not many; and when we foxhunters protected the rebel women and children, they did the same by ours once or twice."

"What about Kilcullen churchyard, Larry?" I asked.

"A regular fiasco. Dundas made a mere handful of dragoons charge up-hill to attack a few hundred rebels entrenched in the old churchyard. A child could foresee that they would be driven back with heavy losses. Did not our old chief swear about it just."

"These were going on almost at once?"

"Something like it. Carlow, Meath, Kildare, all in insurrection more or less; but Wexford, of course, was the great outbreak,

and there the stream divided pretty much into two, Vinegar Hill, of course, the centre, New Ross and Wexford the extreme points."

"At one time there were many thousands enlisted under the green flag; but they were so undisciplined, and even their officers knew nothing about it, that they did less than one could have expected. It was well we got to Wexford in time to prevent all the prisoners being massacred in cold blood."

"Any news of Tom Corish?"

"Yes, Major Tracy has got him out to a married brother who has property in America, and Norah will go out very soon with Tracy's sister-in-law, who has not sailed yet, so they are all right."

"Her ladyship is at liberty, sir, and will receive you," announced a footman.

"Tell her I will wait on her at once," said Arthur, a message which evidently astonished Larry much, but he said nothing as he followed Arthur from the room. We were all dining at home for once, and Lady Rachel and Kathie were going to a military ball.

Presently Arthur returned, laughing.

"It is the best thing I ever saw. Larry is clean over head and ears in love at first sight."

"Not with Lady Rachel? I hope he will not offend her."

"Offend her? It's the most delicate flattery in the world, for it is so genuine. Larry, who

never set eyes on a lady of fashion, has quite lost his head and heart."

"Does she notice it?"

"A month-old baby would notice it. She vows he is delicious; has ordered me to send for his things, establish him here, and then she will form him."

"He is as astonishing as Kathleen," I remarked.

"Yes, little one, there is certainly no chance of monotony with a few members of your family about."

It was nearly dinner-time when Larry reappeared, so full of Lady Rachel's enchanting looks and manners that he could speak of nothing else. Arthur being in his own room I was the recipient of his raptures. At last he cooled down a little, and asked if I were not going to the ball. I told him I was not, and he remarked Arthur did not look himself, and then said:

"Sure I want to know, Bride, is it London fashion for sons to go on in that play-acting way with their mothers? He is just as polite to Lady Rachel as if she were a lady of quality; kissing her hand, and what not."

I laughed heartily at Larry's way of putting things.

"And is not she a lady of quality, you blundering boy?"

"Ah, don't you know what I mean, now? He is so stiff to her."

"She prefers it," I said. "And he had not seen her, I think, to-day."

"And he living in the same house. Did one ever hear the like of it?"

"She is not quite like mother," I answered.

"Ah, well, she's a real beauty," Larry said, not wishing to hear a word of disparagement.

"What wouldn't I give to be a few years nearer her age?"

"Bravo, Larry!" cried Arthur, who just came in as he spoke. "Never mind your age, man; I'll be a dutiful stepson if you're successful."

Rather discomfited Larry blushed, but rallying himself, exclaimed:

"There are few girls look half so young; just see her complexion, now."

"Brilliant, isn't it?" said Arthur, with a mischievous glance at me. "But it is a peculiarity of London air to increase the bloom on the ladies' cheeks as time slips on."

Not the least understanding his allusion, as paint and powder were unknown in Wexford, Larry opened his eyes in some astonishment, then went on:

"I can't go to the ball to-night without clothes, can I? Ah, what are you two laughing at? Sure, of course I mean, with my Irish evening clothes on."

"Like the great diplomatist, you seem to think words given you to conceal your mean-

ing," returned Arthur, still laughing. "I concluded you wished to represent Le Beau Savage, thinking it a masquerade! Oh, for once your garments would pass muster."

"But I left them in Ireland, coming to think of it."

"Then I'm afraid you can't have them in time. I have a new suit, but it will hardly fit you."

"Not a fear of it, you are too long and too wide. What will I do at all? Your mother told me I must come."

"Oh, your uniform will do, it's a military ball. I'll give you all etcetera, and you shall go to my tailor to-morrow."

This important matter settled, Kathleen arrived, in time to go into ecstasies over Larry before dinner, and Arthur took the chance of whispering to me:

"The plot thickens. Cecil Geraldyn came over with Larry."

I had no time to express my surprise, for we had to descend to the saloon, and Larry, to his extreme, delight conducted Lady Rachel to dinner, and sat by her, almost too much lost in admiration to eat or drink, and she played off her airs and graces, and enjoyed his devotion immensely.

She was pleased to consider my taste good in colours, so, as was common, I went to see her attire and assist in deciding weighty matters of dress, and she declared Larry to be

an unusually pretty fellow, and was gracious and amiable.

In his showy picturesque uniform Larry was remarkably good to look at, and I felt proud of him and of Kathie as they stood waiting for the carriage, their strong family likeness showing even more than usual.

Presently Lady Rachel came, splendidly dressed in rich brocade embroidered with gold, and with a very good imitation of Arthur's stately formal courtesy, Larry handed her to the carriage, carrying her bouquet, gloves, fan, handkerchief, and other trifles, as if they were sacred relics, much to the delight of Kathie, whose quick eyes had speedily detected his state of mind.

CHAPTER XII.

"Love rules the court, the camp, the grove."

Soon after the carriage started Mr. Geraldyn was announced.

He looked remarkably well in the elaborate evening dress then in fashion.

His dainty muslin cravat was fastened with a splendid diamond, the richly-embroidered waistcoat only caught at the bottom with two jewelled buttons, to show his elaborate ruffled and worked shirt-front and diamond studs. Silk stockings and buckled shoes set off a handsome leg and foot, and a lace-edged handkerchief peeped from his pocket. Ah! in my young days fine gentlemen looked what they were, and were not ashamed to be dandies on occasion.

There was no fear of their ever being mistaken for waiters; an accident which, I am told, may occur now.

Handsome as Mr. Geraldyn looked, he was less boyish in appearance than when he had ridden to Ballydorough. He had seen service since then, and some of those scenes of pain and danger which age men more quickly than the flight of time, and on the whole it improved him.

He was as friendly and warm in his greeting as he had been when last we parted, and told us Lady Geraldyn had said Arthur was ill, so he had come to inquire on his way to the ball.

"I am glad to see you any way, Cis," Arthur replied. "It was only the effect of the Irish pikes lasted rather unreasonably. I am really well again now."

"Not going to the ball to-night?"

Discretion was the better part of valour. "We shall appear again at the Carlton House masquerade."

"And you, Mrs. Gordon, are not going to honour us to-night either?"

"She has the bad taste to prefer remaining with me," Arthur said smiling. "Do you not wish some fair lady would be as gracious to you, Cis?"

"I envy you, Gordon, with all my heart," Mr. Geraldyn replied, with a sudden earnestness that contrasted with Arthur's jesting tones, and a flush of colour like a girl's blush on his fair face.

"Find yourself a wife," said I laughing, "then you will have a lady always at hand."

"It is easy to tell me that, Mrs. Gordon, but not so easy to win a lady's favours," he said so disconsolately that Arthur could hardly help laughing, and said:

"Cecil, that sounds suspicious. Have you left your heart in Ireland, man?"

"Certainly not," he said curtly.

"I am glad of it; you will not be above considering gaieties, then. My mother wishes to give a ball, but I recommend a water-party. Down the river, you know, to picnic, and return home by moonlight among the water lilies; with the boats illuminated, romance, champagne, pretty girls, river fogs, and all the usual things."

Mr. Geraldyn's sleepy blue eyes lightened eagerly at Arthur's description.

"The thing of all others this hot weather, Gordon; delightful!"

"Well, you will see Lady Rachel to night; give your vote to my side. Good-night, and a pleasant ball, I hope."

"Poor Cis!" Arthur went on as the door closed on him. "He sees himself adoring Kathleen under the willows on the Thames. Depend upon it the water-party will carry the day; there is no such chance for a man as down the river by moonlight."

"I wonder how the romance will all end?"

"Diamonds *versus* devotion; affection against affluence and ambition. I doubt Master Cecil's chance being worth a brass farthing."

"Poor fellow!" I said; "he will be awfully disappointed."

"Why, yes, his condition is desperate, that's clear; but, my dear, wherever Kathie throws the handkerchief there will be plenty left tearing their hair."

"Probably; but I don't know much of the rest, and Mr. Geraldyn is so attractive."

"Most women say so; that soft, sleepy way of his takes; but under that pretty girlish face there is a considerable amount of fire; he is a regular dare-devil."

"Is Lord Headland progressing?"

"I cannot tell; Kathie is the most tormenting mortal. I thank my stars I am not one of her victims to be coaxed with those Irish 'Ah, do's' and 'Ah, don'ts' one minute and kept off at arm's length the next. And she does it all so neatly too. It's wholesome enough for Headland, he has had it all his own way so long; I should be driven wild."

Arthur spoke lightly, evidently viewing Kathleen's coquetry as favourably as men usually do any behaviour of a pretty girl who has no power to inflict wounds on them personally.

"Lady Rachel told me it was well you had chosen me," I replied, "for I should never have the power to arouse passions, and we should lead a commonplace life."

"My lady knows less of men than I gave her credit for," Arthur returned. "In dealing with an undeniable beauty like Kathie, one is at least forewarned, and goes to one's fate open-eyed; but you little soft tender things show no danger signals, and a man never realizes his condition till some day he

wakes up suddenly and finds he is hopelessly enslaved."

"Was that your misfortune, sir?"

"Faith and it was! I dropped into the family party like one of yourselves. I had never realized what home-life meant, and did not understand why I always longed for the welcome after a day's sport, when we used to count the game before the great hall fire, with you girls giving us hot punch, and your mother scolding us for not changing our wet clothes."

"What opened your eyes?"

"Partly knowing my leave was nearly out, partly hearing Sam O'Connor bragging he should marry you, and having a row with one of the Barringtons about you; they would have fought, I think, but both were very drunk, and could not remember next day what they had quarrelled over. I was sober enough, and luckily just had self-control to hold my tongue, but I could have killed those two fools for daring to speak of you; and I swore that night if I did not wed you, I would never try for woman's favour again."

Arthur spoke passionately enough, his eyes flashing at the remembrance; then dropping into the gentle tone he habitually used to me, he added:

"So, little white witch, you need not think yourself powerless. I know you cost me a good many sleepless nights, for you were so

shy with me directly I tried to show what I wanted, that it was more baffling than the most finished coquetry. I might as well try to hold a running brook as detain you five minutes in those days."

"I did not mean to avoid you exactly," I answered blushing. "But I—liked—you a little, and I was so afraid I should show it."

"Show it! Not you! You grudged me word or look, it seemed to me. I used to pace my room half the night, wondering if my lady was right, and I should never make a woman care for me."

"You know better than that now," I whispered.

"Thank God I do, child, but you tantalized me long enough. I felt half mad sometimes when I believed it was not in me to win you, and that I should have to go away with that terrible craving for your love unsatisfied."

"And yet you considered it wholesome for Headland," I said saucily.

"Headland is not a bad fellow, but he fancies he is conferring an honour in offering his future dukedom to any one, and I fancy that Kathie sees that, and is nettled. Her beauty would adorn the highest position she could be raised to, and she is too proud to forego her womanly privileges."

"So Catherine has a full right to tease him, you think? How about the rest?"

"The wealthy baronet has had his *coup de*

grâce, as you know. Cecil Geraldyn is the one it will go hard with; probably his arrival will stir up Headland to a little more ardour and finish the matter; he has had no such dangerous rival yet."

"How do you know he is so cool? You kept up a calm exterior," I retorted.

"I suspect no one took special notice of me," Arthur said laughing. "Mr. and Mrs. Kavanagh forgot you were not a child: Walter had his hands full; and as to that scatter-brain Larry, he was never still long enough to heed his neighbours."

"Did you not wonder he could give so good an account of Irish affairs?"

"Indeed I did. Oh, he does not want for wits when he is pleased to use them. How much did you know of the Wexford business, Bride?"

"Scattered facts only; of course we heard of most of the great affairs. You probably knew more in England from the newspapers."

"I heard nothing special till one night at mess. I had come in late from riding a match, and was too hungry to notice there were strangers at dinner; when suddenly the colonel roared out, all down the table, 'Gordon, have you not relatives in Wexford?' I said I had, and he called out, 'You'll be interested in the insurrection. Pretty doings! Here's a gentleman fresh from there!' Of course I could not move till the

cloth was taken off, but I wanted no more dinner, and I thought it never would end."

"Who was the gentleman?"

"His name was Richards, he had connections in Wexford. He told me of the camps on Vinegar Hill, Slieve Buoy, and Kilthomas, and said evidently the rebels wanted to command the Nore and Barrow rivers as well as the Slaney, so threatened New Ross. They had cut to pieces Captain Adams' detachment under the Hill of Forth and taken their guns, and the rebels were much elated; and also they routed Colonel Maxwell at the same point."

"Ah, we heard of that; his reinforcements failed him."

"I fancy it was a blunder, of which there were plenty."

'It was said so. Some of those troops got John Colclough and carried him with them as a sort of hostage as far as the river Scarpass, and after that the rebel horse fell on them near Duncannon Fort, drove them on to Taylor's town bridge, and shot numbers. Mr. Richards told me of private people being slaughtered and atrocities without end. It drove me nearly wild to think what might be happening to you, and I demanded an interview with the colonel and begged for leave."

"Did he grant it at once?"

"Not he! an inspection was due. He was short of officers, and is a bit of a martinet."

"How did you get it?"

"I went to the verge of mutiny over it, I believe. I swore I would go without leave, even though I knew my whole career would be blasted for life by such an act; and though he vowed I should be put under arrest, somehow I touched his heart. He is a good old fellow and fond of me, and he saw I was desperate, so relented, and I left barracks an hour after, and was never so thankful in my life as at the moment I reached Ballydorough and found all safe."

"How did you get there?" I had no time to ask anything, somehow.

"Poor little thing, hurried into marriage at a moment's notice. I bought a pony, rode half the way, turned it loose, and then bribed a car to set me down about three miles away. Walter was in the park and took me for my own ghost, I think, but he had heard so much bad news that day, he used all his influence to get your father's consent to our hasty wedding."

"It nearly cost you your life."

"Very nearly, sweetheart. Doctor Somers told me he believed me dead, when you reached Ballydorough."

"How much do you remember of that journey?"

"Not much. I remember the agony the jolting was, and I have a hazy recollection of struggling against delirium, and knowing it was getting the better of me, and of waking out

of a dream to see Larry, and then I knew no more till I heard your voice and Walter's and found myself in a bed."

"It would have been a very different world if I had lost you, dear," I said, and just then Jervis brought in the supper-tray.

CHAPTER XIII.

"There, when the day was ended, all the trees
Were hung with myriad many-coloured lamps,
And skilfully-concealed musicians woke
The distant echoes to a merry dance,
And thus renewed the revels till the morn."

ARTHUR had a long day's work on the day after the ball in providing Larry's outfit, and many similar matters in which father had given him *carte blanche* to use his own discretion, saying he had full confidence in Arthur's judgment, which pleased me not a little.

There was company to dinner, and I was dressed before the gentlemen returned.

"Are you beforehand, or is it so late?" asked Arthur, as he entered my room.

"Not late really, but Kathleen takes longer than I do, so I have let Camlet go to her. Are you not tired, dear? And where is Larry?"

"I am worn out with laughing at the boy, that's all. Where is he? Why, helping to choose my lady's breast-knots and jewels."

"Nonsense, Arthur, how could he venture to go to her room?"

"Nothing would serve but he must bring her some flowers; and as the longer his fancy

lasts the less trouble he'll be, I encouraged him; so on our return he marched off to present them, and was invited in, and I caught a glimpse of him clasping on a necklace."

"Really he is too audacious. How did you get on in the streets?"

"He proposed at first to wait till the people had all passed, mistook my tailor for a peer of the realm, and between pretty women, horses, and shop windows was completely off his balance, and concluded there was a powerful deal more to see than between two high walls in a muddy borreen. I threatened at last to buy a pair of blinkers for him."

"Do you know your mother has arranged to go to Ranelagh after dinner to see the fireworks?"

"Jervis told me when we came in. There is a gala to-night; you will like it, little one."

"If it does not overtire you," I said, for he had only been quite free of fever for a few days.

"I am all right, sweetheart. You will have no further excuse for spoiling me, nor I for selfishly monopolizing you; and I would not let that boy go without me on any account; your father trusts him to me, and, raw as he is, heaven knows what scrapes he would be in."

Larry was unsophisticated enough, but mother had been so careful with us all that

he only showed it in excessive chivalry to all the ladies, who voted him delicious, admired his fine eyes, noted his likeness to Kathleen, which seemed stronger than ever, and did their utmost to turn his head with their flatteries. He bore the ordeal very well. Where he was ignorant of fashionable observances his native quickness helped him out, or he watched Arthur, who was always a courteous and dignified host, though I doubt if the two elderly ladies of rank who sat by him that night were amusing companions. However, men did not only consider what pleased them then, and Arthur was as attentive to these two dowagers as if they were charming, though I fancy he was glad to bow us all out of the door and receive his mother's injunctions not to sit over the wine, but make ready for Ranelagh.

The gardens were like fairyland with their shady walks and leafy bowers all lit up with hundreds of twinkling many-coloured lamps.

From time to time music rang out or voices joined in soft harmony.

Merry groups strolled about—beaux and belles, rich, jolly citizens from the east of Temple Bar, country cousins all agape with wonder.

Presently, with a whish and a bang, the rockets rushed up, their golden shower of sparks bright against the purple darkness of the sky, the real stars paled for a moment,

and by the brief illumination bringing many facts into strong relief unexpectedly.

I caught sight of Kathleen on a seat much at her ease, with Lord Headland and Mr. Geraldyn both leaning over her, and she also saw me and my escort, a brother officer of Arthur's, who had promised to take Larry to Hounslow to report himself on the morrow.

Rather to my astonishment she joined us, by a sudden move eluding her two cavaliers, and whispered:

"Bride, darling, don't lose sight of me; I want to stay with you."

Left in the lurch, the two men looked at each other none too amiably, and sauntered off in different directions, each intending to join us by himself; but by ill luck, as we wandered up the broad walk they came out simultaneously almost face to face from opposite sides, a coincidence which so evidently vexed them both that I was thankful to fall in with Lady Rachel, for in those days of duels no trifle was too small to give offence and produce a challenge, especially when men were jealous of each other.

Indeed, I have known a man go out and fight though it was all a mistake, and he had neither given offence nor knew the other man by sight, but considered an explanation beneath him till the duel was over.

A large party gathered round us now, and Kathleen could indulge safely in general

repartee. As usual, she was the centre of an amused admiring circle.

Lord Headland was not quick at jesting, but he stood by her steadily, evidently intending to maintain his ground.

Whether his airs of possession fretted her I do not know, but turning from him she bestowed all her favours and fascinations on old Lord Verular, a worthy gouty old man, who, half a century before, had been one of the wildest, most dashing men of his day, and had startled half Europe by his extravagant exploits. Old as he was, he had still an eye for pretty women, and responded in a debonair manner to Kathie's witcheries, even if he saw the motive that prompted her to bestow her favours so liberally on himself, and finally let himself be coaxed into escorting her away to see a puppet-show in another part of the gardens.

In standing back somewhat sulkily to let Kathie and her elderly beau pass, Lord Headland pushed Mr. Geraldyn roughly aside; their tempers were both ruffled, and, with his blue eyes flashing fire, Cecil was about to resent it very angrily, and incalculable mischief might have been done, but Lady Rachel suddenly cried out she had dropped a diamond bracelet, and importuned every one so pressingly to search at once that the words remained unspoken, and in the confusion were, I suppose, forgotten or thought better of. The

bracelet could not be found, because, as Arthur whispered to me, it probably never had been lost.

"How clever and ready it was to interrupt them thus then," I whispered in return.

"Aye, very; you see a duel's a convenient way of disposing of a troublesome suitor, but the wrong one gets killed sometimes; then," he added suddenly aloud, eagerly, "My lady, who on earth is this with Lady Geraldyn?"

"Pray don't startle one so with your abruptness!" Lady Rachel replied pettishly. "Ah, I see, it is excusable for once; you did not expect to see Flora—your old flame?"

"Good heavens! is she come to that?" Arthur exclaimed, and advanced, hat in hand, to greet Lady Geraldyn and her companion, a very fat though still pretty woman, rustling in the richest of satins, gay with the most brilliant colours, and wearing so much jewellery that it rattled and jingled as she moved. She looked quite as old as her mother, whose tall, lithe figure was as slender and graceful as though she were still a girl; but still she seemed so good-natured and beaming with content, I liked her looks.

"Gracious goodness!" she cried, as Arthur stood before her. "Don't tell me you're Arthur Gordon; go away, do, you horrid man."

"Ah, don't be so cruel to one of your oldest admirers," he replied laughingly as he raised her plump jewelled hand to his lips.

"Are you not enough to make one hate you, looking so slight still. Dear, dear, dear!" she rattled on. "And there's Lady Rachel; I'm sure she is not aged a day; younger, I declare, than when I went to India. How d'ye do, how d'ye do? Who's the handsome boy that's devouring you with his great eyes, Lady Rachel? Oh, fie, fie, you naughty woman! just as bad as ever. Oh dear, let me sit down, do—it's awful to be so fat."

She plumped herself on a seat, nodding to every one she recognized, and chattered on.

"Who is that? Lord Headland, is it? Don't you remember me? Have you forgotten upsetting the saucepan over me when we made hardbake on the sly? I've got the mark still, can't show you though; you see I wore little socks then—but I give you my word it's there."

She pushed forward a plump ankle, and indicated the spot with her great feather fan, then, returning to Arthur, exclaimed:

"Where's your second wife, sir? I don't care if you've got a dozen, like an Indian prince, I was the first—married with the curtain-ring, only old nurse cheated me out of the diamonds. What a rage you flew in, Arthur; and you wanted to swear only you didn't know how, so we threw our bread and milk at her, and mine went over you by mistake and spoilt your velvet tunic."

Taking advantage of a lull in her flow of words, Arthur presented me.

She shook hands good-naturedly, saying:

"Well, now, I am glad he's got such a nice wife. Oh, I know I shall like you. You'll come and see me, won't you? and I'll tell you all about him. Ah, he was such a bad boy."

"Dear, dear, I feel quite like a ghost," her brother laughed outright. "I don't see the resemblance, Flo," he said.

"Oh, you rude child," she cried, with a jolly laugh. "I didn't say I looked like one, did I? It's like coming back to earth, to see all my old friends grown up, after being so many many years in India. I've left my husband behind, you know, so there's only five children to remind me I'm Mrs. MacNab, and not Flo Geraldyn still. Arthur, take me for a walk. You won't be jealous, Mrs. Gordon?"

"Certainly not," I answered smiling; "you have quite the first right to him."

She laughed again till her jewellery jingled like bells.

"That's right. You'll come too, won't you? Cis 'll take care of you. You know him, of course? He is a nice boy; but, dear, dear, I wish he was not in love with a pretty Irish girl without a penny, when I'd get him an Indian princess with bushels of diamonds. What have I said now? Something stupid, by everybody's face. Explain now, Arthur, do."

"I think you are treating me very badly," he said, offering his arm. "First you raise my hopes by inviting me to escort you, then spoil it all by asking my wife also. I really shall carry you off by force."

He fairly walked her off before she could make any more inconvenient remarks, and Mr. Geraldyn rather abruptly begged me to honour him by accepting his escort, and, after a few minutes' silent walking, said, with rather an effort:

"Mrs. Gordon, tell me you are not offended with my sister's folly; she really meant no harm, but she is such a chatterer, and has no tact."

I assured him I was not so foolish, and that I was sure Mrs. MacNab was too kind-hearted to give offence willingly.

"That is quite true; but she was married at sixteen to a very rich, oldish man, and Indian life and his indulgence have made her what you see."

We were silent again for a time. I tried to think of something to say to my meditative, silent companion; but suddenly he turned to me, as if awaking from his abstraction to a decided resolution, and said:

"Mrs. Gordon, will you be my friend? I know you are good and kind, and I cannot fancy you are like all other women, who believe in nothing but riches and position being worth a thought; you will not turn your sister against me because I cannot offer

her a dukedom? Though, indeed, she ought to be an empress."

"I will promise you that willingly, Mr. Geraldyn," I replied; "but more I cannot. Kathleen's own heart must decide the rest."

"Can you not give me any hope? Does she never give an indication of caring for me ever so little? Surely she cannot be quite insensible to my devotion, when I would give my life for her!"

He was getting so excited that I answered rather coolly to check him:

"Mr. Geraldyn, sisters are not apt to confide all their thoughts to each other. I can truly say this much, I have seen in her no sign of love for any other man."

At this he burst into rapturous gratitude, then said sadly:

"But she is Lady Rachel's pupil, and I know well enough how every influence is being used to make her Headland's wife. She is young and unsuspecting, and no match for a clever woman of the world."

His words startled me; but I thought in his jealousy he was prejudiced, and said:

"Of one thing I am sure, that if, after wedding, Kathie regretted her choice, it would be worse for you than if you were rejected. I will not promise to use my influence in your favour, but I will beseech her to consider and not be dazzled by ambition in making her decision."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Love wandering through the golden maze
Of my beloved's hair,
Found at each step such sweet delays,
That rapt, he lingered there."

Our confidential conversation was interrupted by a summons to join the rest for supper in a pavilion, and there Mrs. MacNab's merry, unceasing chatter engrossed every one. However, before I slept that night I told Arthur all that had passed, and he praised my discretion and declared he also thought it best to be strictly neutral in so delicate a matter; for no doubt Lord Headland was by far the better match, and if Kathleen really loved Cecil, Cupid would assert his power and carry the day; and he added with a laughing reminiscence of Mrs. MacNab:

"Heaven be praised that one does not always marry one's first love."

Larry was off to Hounslow early after a very tender farewell to Lady Rachel, though he was rather startled at finding he must bid her adieu before she rose, and sent Arthur into fits by refusing to go up, under the idea we were all poking fun at him, and exclaiming:

"By the powers, now, did any one ever

hear of a lady of quality letting one see her in her nightcap?"

However, I at last prevailed on him to go under my wing, and, if the fashion rather shocked him, still he admired Lady Rachel more than ever, reclining on her pillows under her rich satin quilt, and marvelled at her lovely rosy colour which he still believed in.

We missed his bright face and the absurd mistakes which kept us constantly amused; but there was not much leisure.

The water party had been decided on on condition Arthur made all arrangements and saved Lady Rachel all exertion. As he had originated the idea, he was anxious it should be a success, and spared himself no trouble; and I wrote invitations and helped where I could.

The grand masquerade at Carlton House was also a subject of general discussion just now, and it would precede the water party by two or three days, so costumes had to be arranged.

Mrs. MacNab had taken a fancy to me, and spent much of her time in my room, chattering incessantly and carrying me off to her house to see her Indian treasures, with which in her lavish good-nature she would have loaded me, had I allowed it. I liked the Geraldyns' house, especially now there were five grandchildren to play with, as well as Joan and Rosie.

Many a fine game of romps I had with them all, to the astonishment of the dark, turbaned ayahs who had charge of the little white-faced, delicate MacNabs, who were to be left in England for their health.

I always felt before Lady Rachel so much older and more dignified, though she liked me well enough, I believe. She could not be jealous of me—I was too insignificant and quiet to be a rival. She was willing enough that I should monopolize all the love her son could give, for in her eyes his affectionate, sensitive temperament was a defect, and she vowed him much improved since he no longer asked of her anything like sympathy, but paid her compliments, and treated her with the courtesy he would have used to a stranger. For she was entirely self-engrossed, and took no interest in his hopes, or aims, or life.

Kathie's relations with her were difficult to define. My quick-sighted sister was alive to the utter hard selfishness of Lady Rachel's character, and liked it little; but, at the same time, was wonderfully influenced by her judgment and easily led by her, and I hardly realized how cleverly Lady Rachel worked on her vanity and ambition.

In the Geraldyns' house there was little formality, every one went their own way; but there was plenty of honest affection among them all, and Lady Geraldyn was

doubtless a wonderfully clever woman. Her handsome, heavy husband was devoted to her, and, if she ruled him with a rod of iron, she was fond of him, and of all her children, especially of Cecil, whom it was clear she idolized, and was divided between disappointment at his heart being set on a penniless girl, and annoyance that Kathie could resist him.

Flora MacNab was marvellously outspoken in her confidences, and would not be checked, calling me a dear little simpleton if I did not like to listen.

"My dear, what does it matter? Every one knows I married MacNab for his money, and a dear good old goose he is. I wouldn't change my old man now to be a queen. How you're laughing! Oh! I know I'm not a bit like a queen. I don't care; I only want to be jolly. What were we saying? Oh! to be sure, the Geraldyns are poor as church mice. I wonder why church mice, not house mice? The property's mortgaged. We all lived hand-to-mouth; only mother is such a woman, always managing something clever. I never could. Cecil has got a little of his own if it is not gambled away."

"I do not think Mr. Geraldyn plays much now," I said.

"Now? bless your innocence! He does nothing but wander about to catch a glimpse of the hem of your sister's gown, and I don't

believe she cares two straws for him, though they did save each other's lives, and all that sort of thing, in that dreadful fight. How ever did you all live through it? and how did you get the house clean? They say blood never comes out. It must have been like the last scene of a play, only you hadn't blue lights and slow music; and such a mess after, dear, dear!"

A shout of laughter interrupted her at this point, Arthur and her two brothers having entered. She joined good-humouredly, saying:

"There, laugh away. When you are mistresses of houses, Cis and Bill, you'll know the cleaning-up is a trouble. Well, no, you won't be mistresses, but your wives will, you know. But it must have been as romantic as the Crusades we all used to play at."

"Yes," said Arthur, "when you were an Amazonic princess and I was your war steed, and Cis and Bill were Saracens whom we overthrew off the dining-room table. Lord Geraldyn is at this very moment being ridden by three grandchildren round that same table."

"Dear old dad, he is so good. Let's go and have a game too, Bride. Come along now, you boys, it will do you good. Bride is always ready."

"May I have the privilege of again being your charger?" asked Arthur saucily.

Flora went off into unextinguishable laughter.

"Oh, you droll thing. Mind I don't take you at your word. Fancy you down on your hands and knees and me on your back! I weigh twelve stone, you know, and you're so stiff and stately nowadays. What makes you? Is it all the wounds you got? Some one said Bride sewed them all up just as if you were a worn-out stocking, you know."

"Well, in confidence now, Mrs. MacNab, if you won't tell any one," said Arthur mysteriously, "the truth was, the cotton was too thick, so the seams are stiff and I can't bend."

"Oh, you silly creature! I vow I really thought you had something to say. Come along now, do."

And we all adjourned to the dining-room, where good-natured Lord Geraldyn was playing with the seven children, and declared we had arrived just in time to save his life. High romps ensued, every one was dragged into blind man's buff, and in the height of the noise Kathie slipped in. Lady Rachel had brought her to pay a call, and, attracted by the merry sounds, she had deserted the more stately company in the drawing-room.

Cecil had been for some minutes the "blind man," and being near the door, caught Kathie's dress as she entered. In the hubbub of children's voices the opening of the door was unnoticed.

There was a pause, the children, finger on lip, dancing with glee. A few glances of

amusement among the elder players, Kathie blushed red, but stood silent and proudly as, according to the rules of the game, Mr. Geraldyn passed his hand lightly over her face and figure.

"None so blind as those who won't see," whispered Bill Geraldyn, a saucy boy of sixteen. "What a chance for Cis; he'll be all day finding out for the pleasure of stroking her hair."

"What do you know of such things, you young scamp?" said his father. "Cannot you make out your prey, Cis? Do you give her up? Are you beaten?"

"That's a thing I never confess to being, sir, and I will not give her up," answered Mr. Geraldyn, with more earnest a tone than befitted the play. "It is Miss Kavanagh."

The children's shouts drowned all other sounds, but I guessed Cecil whispered a few soft words, as he tenderly bound the kerchief over Kathie's eyes, for Kathleen drew up her head disdainfully, and would hardly touch his hand as he turned her the prescribed three times.

In another minute she was playing as gaily and actively as a child, her laughter ringing out merrily and her light figure darting about the room inpursuit; but though Mr. Geraldyn risked himself recklessly she never touched him, and finally made capture of a four-year-old boy, and devoting herself entirely to the

little ones was even more charming than ever, till Lady Rachel summoned her to make her adieus. The children, quite fascinated with her pretty ways, clung to her, imploring her to stay, but she laughed and kissed them, saying, "Another day, my darlings. What! more kisses? Well, just one all round, then."

"I'm a little one, Miss Kavanagh," said Bill, dropping on one knee and putting up his pretty, saucy face. Kathie stooped forward as if to kiss him, gave him a slap instead, and was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

"And though not bidden to parade
Their scenic powers in masquerade,
It yet was hoped, and well that hope
Was answered by the young and gay,
That in toilette's task to-day,
Fancy should take her wildest scope."

The day after the game of blind man's buff Mrs. MacNab appeared rather early.

"I give you warning, Arthur, I'm going to talk about nothing but gowns."

"I might learn too much, then," he replied. "I will retire from these mysteries."

"Oh, you know you're married, so it's all right for you to hear; you know all about how we dress and paint, and everything, only Bride does not put any on."

"Well, I was under a delusion that she wore some garments," returned Arthur.

"Oh, dear, how you do take one up, you silly man. I mean she doesn't paint. Some people say she'd look better. I don't, though. I like that soft white skin, and she blushes so prettily. Now Miss Kavanagh rouges, does she not?"

"That she doesn't," I cried.

"Really? Cecil swore she didn't. I don't know how he could tell; I vow he's never

kissed her, she's as proud as Lucifer. But, dear, what a complexion she has if it's natural."

> "Her cheeks were like roses,
> Her lips were the same,
> Or a dish of fresh strawberries smothered in crame,"

quoted Arthur.

"What is that parcel? Some of the mysteries, Mrs. MacNab?"

"No, it's something that little stiff thing there shall accept. She is so tiresome. I want to give her lots of things, and she won't take a quarter. Now do make her. I know no one it's so made for."

It was a delicate piece of Indian embroidery, dainty flowers on a transparent ground, and I accepted it willingly to her great delight, and assured her it was the very thing for my masquerade dress for Carlton House.

"Ah, that's what I've come to talk about," she exclaimed.

"Inexhaustible topic! I am off," said Arthur. "Have you any commands, Bride? If not, I shall go and select the boats."

He went, and we plunged into the details of our costumes till there was no more to say about them, when Flora began about Cecil.

"Poor boy! he is desperately enamoured, though he does not show it so much. I'm glad he doesn't, love-sick people are a bother; but he is pleasant and kind at home, only he can't help hanging on her words and looks.

Wasn't it funny he should catch her? How did he guess? He must have seen."

"I am sure I don't know," I said, thinking such speculations rather useless.

"It's no good, she never can resist Headland, you know. Cis has so little to offer — just his handsome face, and little enough besides his pay—and she accustomed to such luxury."

"Not at home," I answered. "We lived simply enough there, and we were very happy. Father is not rich."

"The very reason she loves it the more," said Flora shrewdly. "Now we lived such ups and downs, sometimes ever so rich, then so poor, but always somehow fine clothes and all that, only they weren't always paid for, I daresay. MacNab paid off thousands to get me. Fancy what a lot he thought of me. How I did cry, rivers full, when mother told me I was to marry him. They were just off to Russia, and I had to take him."

"And now you are glad you did."

"That I am. Mother knew best; she said he was the very man for me, and the best-hearted soul breathing, so he is: if I wanted the moon he'd fetch a ladder. He wants me to take out all my brothers and he'll make their fortunes, or find them Begums rich as anything—a little dark, you know, but you can't have everything. Rather like the ayahs, as I tell Cis."

I could not help laughing at the idea of

Mr. Geraldyn's refined, elegant face and the swarthy ayah with rubies fastened to her nose.

"Oh, you don't know what your husband's like in a year, and it's all the same after all. Arthur's like an old picture and so on, but you'd love him just as well if he wasn't, so Cis would not care if he'd just give his mind to it and be sensible; but there, what's the good of talking when a man's in love?"

"Not much, I think, so you had better give it up."

"Well, to be sure. Father and mother have said enough, so I shall let him alone, poor fellow. I vow your sister would like to go to India with me."

"I believe Kathie would like any adventurous life."

"La, how the nabobs would run after her. She'd have ten offers a day at least. Does she like London life?"

"I fancy sometimes it is irksome to have such restrictions, and be unable to ride and run about at will."

"She will find other excitements when she is a marchioness. She likes gambling now, and there are other things besides that, you know," added Flora with a knowing look.

I would have asked what she meant, but just then I was informed the Duke of Portishead was below and craved a few minutes if I were at leisure.

"Come to propose," cried Flora. "Run

along, child, do; I shall wait till you come back. La, la, I am all of a tremor to hear your news."

The good-natured old duke had come to ask if we would have an airing on his coach that afternoon. I accepted for myself and Kathie, and sent to inquire Lady Rachel's pleasure in the matter, and the old gentleman, whose mission was in part a blind, drew confidentially to me and said:

"Now, my dear, I want to know something. You will tell me, will you not?"

"What is it, sir? I make no rash vows."

"Well, in confidence, tell me, does your sister like that young slip of a Geraldyn?"

"Truly, sir, I cannot tell you. Sometimes I think she cares for no man at all, and is weary of their suits."

"Tut, tut, it's the young men's faults. Gad, sirs, if I were Headland I'd have a different answer from her. And he says he has only been courting these three weeks, and she does not think of him yet. At his age I'd have made a pretty girl think of me in three days, or——." His grace used a strong alternative, and then added, "Milk and water sops, that's what they are. No wonder a little beauty like her is ashamed of such namby-pamby fellows dangling after her. Cis Geraldyn has a little more fire in him, but verily I believe Headland would dawdle on till his hair was grey. Look ye here, my dear, you and

Arthur and the good-looking boy just over are enough to form a quorum of near relatives. Now I'll propose in all form for Headland, and let's get it settled."

I laughed outright at this idea.

"I am afraid, your grace, we might be like the man who led the horse to the pond and then could not make him drink. Kathleen is wilful."

With a perfect shower of oaths his grace protested that Lord Headland was a fool.

"Oh, sirs, why doesn't he carry her off in a coach to Gretna Green? Something! Anything but this shilly-shallying!"

I could not help laughing the more, and said:

"I thought, sir, it was the part of a wise father to check these imprudences, not to encourage them."

"Eh? you saucy little rogue, so it is, so it is; but dear, dear, was Arthur such a laggard in love?"

"Hardly, sir. I was married at twelve hours' notice."

"That's the way. I only wish I were the man, I'd be half-way to Scotland with her before we were a day older."

"What are you two plotting?" said Kathie, coming in and making a deep courtesy playfully to the duke. "Oh, what guilty countenances! Were you talking of me, now?"

Her random shot embarrassed the duke a little. With several sonorous hems he began:

"My dear young lady, I was discussing with your sister a proposal with regard to taking you for a drive."

"On the coach? Delightful! And I may sit on the box by you and drive? Please say yes. Ah, do now," and she dropped on a hassock at his feet in a kitten-like attitude and with her most beseeching look.

"Headland is going to drive. He will be too proud, I am sure."

Kathie made a mutinous face.

"That's not what I'm wanting. Sure you might come. Ah, do say yes, like a darling. You are not going to be a stony-hearted monster, now?"

"You little witch, stop your coaxing. You would get butter out of a flint. Gad, I have no patience with the young men."

"No more have I," cried Kathie. "That's why I want a nice companion on the box to-day. I'm sick of them all; sure they all say the same things, and don't amuse me one bit. It's like eating unsalted potatoes every day to talk to them."

"I'm afraid I have the gout in one hand!" said the duke.

"Never trouble. I'll drive. Let me see,"—she took up his handsome white hand—"oh, it's not swollen a bit. You're just an impostor. Will I kiss the place to cure it, sir?"

"Give me a chance to kiss those pretty lips, my dear, and I'll not be backward."

"Oh fie, I'm shocked! Do you know I'm thinking I'll go to India and marry a nabob? Mrs. MacNab says they are as plenty as mice in a barn."

"The climate would kill you, my dear."

"Oh, not at all. Mrs. MacNab says that people come out and die of over eating and drinking, and then write home and tell their friends the climate killed them."

"Oh, you little Paddy," laughed the duke rising. "Well, you will be ready, then?"

"If you don't drive I shall not come," said Kathie, well aware she was privileged to take what liberties she liked with the kindly old man, and indeed her pretty playful manner atoned for any saucy speeches, and fascinated most old gentlemen.

Curiosity had impelled Flora to wait in our rooms, but I only told her we were going on the coach, for I felt the rest of the conversation could only be repeated to Arthur, and Mrs. MacNab went away disappointed.

CHAPTER XVI.

"A change comes o'er the Wizard's face,
And his solemn look by degrees gives place
To a half grave, half comical kind of grimace:
'For good or for ill,
I work your will,
Yours be the risk, and mine the skill:
Blame not my art if unpleasant the pill.'"

KATHIE had her wilful way and actually drove the coach, his grace—who had been the first whip in England—sitting by, advising and instructing his apt pupil.

She kept him laughing all the afternoon by her gay chatter, describing how she and Larry had driven many a four-in-hand of donkeys at home and how the stubborn creatures had played them many tricks, usually ending in all bolting in different directions at once and a general upset.

Lord Headland, who was much graver than the jovial old duke, sat behind, looking on with an air of proprietorship which tempted his lady-love to be more provoking than ever, in the hope of vexing him probably; but he was imperturbable, and gave no sign of feeling annoyed at her saucy sallies.

I did not see Arthur till late to tell him of the duke's visit, when he declared himself of the same opinion, and said:

"I wish that one or other would give Kathie the chance of accepting or refusing. She knows her own mind, I'll be bound."

"Perhaps she does not give them the opportunity."

"If I had had half their possibilities you would not have kept me on thorns so long, my dear. Kathie has not slipped through their fingers in your coy fashion."

"Perhaps the masquerade may decide the matter."

"I hope so. A mask may embolden the bashful creatures a little. I have settled everything for the water party, Bride, and chosen a most suggestively picturesque landing-place."

"So now all we want is a fine day."

"Yes; if it should rain I shall get a bad half-hour. My lady will attribute it to my bad management."

The great day of the masquerade arrived at last, and we gathered in the saloon to criticize each other in fancy dress.

Lady Rachel wore a splendid costume of murrey velvet, fur, and gold embroidery, surmounted by a broad, heavily-plumed hat, the whole being copied from a portrait of Rubens' wife, and it suited her stately beauty well.

Kathie, presuming on her position as reigning toast of the day, had procured Larry an invitation, which otherwise could hardly have

been asked for, and he attended Lady Rachel as her page, in a costume of the same date.

Arthur wore a Cavalier dress, which had really belonged to an ancestor, and looked, as Larry remarked, as if he were one of his own descendants stepped out of the frame.

My attire had been arranged to suit his, and was taken from a portrait of the original owner of the pearls, who had been a staunch upholder of the Stuart cause.

Kathie, after many changes of fancy, appeared as an Irish country girl. Lady Rachel had set her face against this, but was obliged to allow that Kathie looked bewitching, and the quaint simplicity of the dress was more uncommon than any combination of rich materials could have been.

The tight bodice was open, showing a neck as white as the lawn which half hid it. Over her dark hair a red kerchief was loosely tied, heightening by contrast her delicate complexion, and the short, bright petticoat displayed her dainty foot and ankle a little more than usual.

The little black velvet half-masks, which were to be *de rigueur*, were donned, and we set out.

The great rooms at Carlton House were fast filling, for we had come purposely rather late, and their splendour surpassed all I had ever beheld.

The hall was transformed into a grotto,

glittering with bright shells and many-coloured stones.

All the staircase was embowered with plants and lovely flowers. One room had been turned to a Turkish divan, with no seats, but only piles of soft cushions.

Another was an Arab tent, lit by curious coloured lamps and hung with strange striped draperies.

In a third, tiger skins and great trophies of armour of all nations decorated the walls and floors.

The largest of all was hung with rich lemon satin brocaded with silver arabesques, the ceiling illuminated with much gilding and colour.

Enormous statues of women held candelabra bearing hundreds of wax candles; on their heads were baskets piled up with a profusion of rare flowers, and a magnificent crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, also carrying many lights.

From the balconies, two or three flights of steps had been run out, and by these and also through an arcade wreathed entirely with roses, access could be had to the gardens, which were large and intersected with labyrinthine walks curiously hedged by clipt trees, in which it was easy to lose oneself, in spite of many coloured lights. The whole reminded me of the Duke of Portishead's grand ball, only on a far more extravagant

scale of luxury and grandeur. And being my first sight of a masquerade, it amused me much to watch the medley of dresses, quakers, queens and kings, knights in armour, fairies, jugglers, costumes of all nations and other devices innumerable, all joining in one ever-changing, moving throng.

The velvet masks were a very effectual disguise. I recognized hardly any one, and danced once or twice with I knew not who.

My knowledge of London society was far too limited for me to join in what constituted the great enjoyment of the evening, namely, under cover of the mask to whisper home truths, innuendoes, or flatteries which could not be openly spoken, and were often malicious and annoying, to those who could not resent what the licence of the evening permitted, though, of course, often they were merry jests, and carried no mischief in their humour.

I was presently led out to dance by a troubadour, handsomely attired in blue and white satin. Though his fair hair was concealed under a flowing wig, I recognized Mr. Geraldyn's soft voice, and taxed him with his identity, to which he laughingly confessed, saying:

"You are quick, Mrs. Gordon, I have escaped detection tolerably hitherto."

"I must not accept your compliment," I answered, "for you are the only person I

have been sure of yet, and your voice betrayed you."

"I must change it when I would not be known, then. However, one is beginning to find people out now. Come through the rooms and I will point you out some."

"Arthur's height makes him conspicuous," Mr. Geraldyn remarked, as we promenaded. "I ran over mentally the tall men I knew, and guessed him at once. He has an erect way of carrying his head that marks him, too."

"That must be Mrs. MacNab," I exclaimed, as we neared a group, the central figure of which was an Indian princess, wearing an ass car load of jewellery, and chattering, as usual, incessantly.

"Yes, her mask is a small disguise if one is in earshot," her brother remarked. "Let us keep clear of her now, and continue our tour of inspection."

We passed on, and saw the Prince himself, our royal host, splendid as Henry VIII.

"Possibly significant of how willingly he would follow his predecessor's example, and make short work of his spouse," whispered Mr. Geraldyn.

"For shame!" I whispered back. "She is not here, I suppose?"

"Gordon swears he caught a distant view of a pair of soiled stockings which could belong to no one else. But if she is here, it is *sub rosa*."

"That must be the Duke of Clarence," I exclaimed, as a jolly man-of-war's man rolled by with Kathie on his arm, and I caught the sound of some queer nautical oaths.

"Undoubtedly; and he has been splicing the main-brace freely as usual. I hope he will not annoy Miss Kavanagh," Cecil said, looking after them, and betraying that he knew Kathie's dress.

"She does not mind him," I replied. "Who is this in a turban?"

"Ah, I cannot tell you. No one can penetrate his disguise; and in his character of Wizard he has set half the room by the ears already. Whoever it is, he seems to know a good deal, especially of every one's past life, and has reminded people of stories they hoped were long since buried in oblivion."

"Have you no idea who he may be?"

"Not the faintest. The Duchess of Portishead vows he is the arch-fiend himself, for he knew too much. My mother protests he must use the black art. Whoever it is, he is clever, and no doubt enjoying the mystery."

We had reached one of the garden entrances, and Mr. Geraldyn looked out into the cool night, hesitated, then said:

"Are you tired of my company, Mrs. Gordon? Would you rather that I took you back to the saloon?"

"Have I been so inattentive a listener, or

so wanting in courtesy, that you ask such a question?"

"You are all that is kindest and most charming," he replied. "But I suspect myself of wearying even your patience with my love-tales."

I had thought we were alone, but the Wizard was just behind, and his dark eyes gleamed through the holes in his mask as he passed us, and I thought he lingered to listen as I replied:

"You have not named the word to me so far; but I do not forbid it if you have anything to say."

"You know well enough what I think, if I do refrain from words," he answered. "Come into the garden with me, if you can bear with me really."

"I think the Wizard is following us," I whispered.

Mr. Geraldyn quickened his pace, and, threading two or three paths, we soon found ourselves in a clipt yew arbour alone.

Mr. Geraldyn threw off his mask as if it stifled him.

"Mrs. Gordon, I am ashamed of my unmanly folly in worrying you thus; but have you still no hope for me?"

I shook my head sadly, for the ring of intense feeling in his tone touched me.

"Why will you not ask her yourself and end the suspense?"

"Would I not? But I have had no chance to-night. She will not leave the saloon, and I cannot force her to do so. On the river I will make an opportunity, and she shall hear me."

He was pacing up and down restlessly, and I let him alone, feeling it was a relief to him to throw by the constraint of society phrases for the moment.

After a while I said:

"Can you not demand an interview at our house?"

"She has given me plainly to understand she will not grant it; tell me," he cried passionately, as stung with a sudden thought, "has Headland been thus favoured?"

I was thankful to be able to answer "No."

"Thank God for it; that would be past all endurance. What a fool I am to bring you here to weary you with my rhapsodies. Now you must hate me; I really want a favour from you, Mrs. Gordon."

"Anything in my power."

"Will you, then, should fortune serve me, help me at the water party to secure a chance of speaking to Kathleen alone? You could do so much for me if only you will."

I promised him that much willingly enough, and, throwing himself on his knee in his gratitude, he kissed my hands.

Suddenly I saw the Wizard standing before

us. Though we were doing no harm I felt confused, and my companion resumed his mask hastily.

The Wizard advancing, asked if we would like our fortunes read by his magic art.

"Say yes," I whispered, and Geraldyn assenting coldly, the Wizard said gruffly:

"Let me see your hand, sir."

"Am I to cross it with silver?"

"No, sir; I am no gipsy wife who deludes silly servant-maids to steal their mistresses' spoons. I learnt my skill under the great wizard of the east, and I will give you advice as well as magic."

"Most people prefer advice being reserved until it is asked for," replied Cecil in a freezing tone.

"The sick often realize not that they require a physician until it is too late," replied the Wizard, not at all abashed by Mr. Geraldyn's manner.

"How does that apply to me, sir? I am in perfect health."

"Bodily health, you should say," corrected the Wizard. "The touch of your hand shows me you have not a mind at rest."

Muttering a few words in an unknown tongue, the Wizard looked into the palm of Mr. Geraldyn's hand.

"I see the line of life has been all but broken. I see perils ahead of a fatal nature unless you walk warily, a woman's wit saved

your life, a woman's folly will cost it before many suns have set."

"I could get as good a fortune at any fair for sixpence," quoth Mr. Geraldyn scornfully.

"Shall I tell you what was nearest your heart once?" asked the Wizard.

"If you like."

"A curious relic, a lady's glove, and a tress of hair; but it was a horse's, not a woman's."

This did visibly astonish my companion, but giving no answer on that subject, he said:

"Your advice, sir?"

"Oh, you will deign to it after all. Keep the tenth commandment, then."

"Very oracular. May I ask if you suppose I covet my neighbour's ox, or his valet?"

"The commandment includes anything that is his—a wide range," said the Wizard drily.

"Madam, may I exercise my skill on you now?"

Half frightened I gave my hand.

He looked at it carefully.

"A pretty little hand; but not useless—well skilled in housewifery. Now for its lines: I see a hasty bridal, a wedding dress torn and bloodstained in the past."

"Any one could tell as much as that, sir," I said. "It is the town's talk."

"Be not so quick, pretty madam, and remember those who marry in haste sometimes repent at leisure. Your companion

has more faith in me since I told him of his keepsake. Perhaps you will believe also in my art when I tell you it is uncommon at your age to have silver locks among chestnut tresses."

I started; for indeed I had a tiny white lock among my hair; but it was always so concealed that none knew it who had not seen my hair unbound, for it grew far back where my braid hid it.

The Wizard continued in hollow tones:

"The blood-stain of the past was innocent. Beware of that of the future!"

Just then Arthur joined us, taking no notice of the Wizard.

He said in an undertone to Cecil:

"Have you forgotten how time passes? your next partner is not likely to brook delay." With a start Mr. Geraldyn said, "May I leave Mrs. Gordon in your care?"

"I came to claim her for a dance."

Mr. Geraldyn went off hurriedly, and the Wizard, who had stood apart, now advanced and asked if Arthur would like to know his fortune.

"Oh, if you like, sir, but I think it is pretty well accomplished," Arthur said carelessly.

"You are born but not buried. Marriage is not the last act of the play," said the Wizard. "What's won must be held fast."

"Any more moral aphorisms?" asked

Arthur. "You must have had experience in composing copy-books."

"Plenty more at your service," replied the Wizard briskly. "Women and cards cannot be depended on — he is wisest who trusts neither."

"That is enough," interrupted Arthur shortly. "If you have nothing better to say, we will leave you to your meditations."

"Softly, sir, I can tell you more; that is a gay jacket of yours, but it covers a good many scars."

"Not unusual in a soldier's coat."

"No, not at all," responded the Wizard; and, raising his magic wand, he indicated with the greatest exactness the position of each of the now healed wounds, not forgetting one on the shoulder of earlier date which he particularized as "French bullet."

Like Mr. Geraldyn and myself, it was clear Arthur was slightly taken aback at the correctness of the Wizard's information in personal matters, but he only said laughingly:

"As a good Protestant, I cannot tamper with the black art, so adieu."

"It's safer to own yourself that to-night than it was on your marriage day," said our mysterious companion. "Well, sir, adieu. Take a last word of advice: he who transplants wild flowers to the garden, must not neglect them, or they will fade or turn to ill weeds."

Arthur's haughty hot temper fired at once at this slightly-veiled allusion.

"Sir, you presume on the liberty allowed by this fooling; with no pretensions to magic art, it is not difficult to foretell what will be the fate of an insolent meddler."

CHAPTER XVII.

"But, trust me, gentles, never yet,
Was dight a masquing half so neat,
Or half so rich before;
The country lent its sweet perfumes,
The sea the pearl, the sky the plumes,
The town its silken store."

We had traversed two or three paths before Arthur recovered himself enough to say with a laugh at his own recent vexation, "The old fool; it is weak to be annoyed at his senseless prating, but he went too far at last."

"How could he know all he told us?" I said, and related all that had passed before Arthur came.

"I don't know, child, but not by magic, though I think you half believe it is. Probably, deciding to play this part, he has bribed half the body-servants and maid-servants in the town, and so picked up details which, cleverly used, are puzzling. I saw him taking heed of an open-and-above flirtation of mine with the fair Flora which might have given rise to his sage remarks. What did he say about Cis and the commandments?"

Instead of answering, I stopped short, a light breaking in on my mind.

"Oh, Arthur, I'm afraid —I did not think what he meant—but it's as clear as day."

"It may be to yourself, but I'm quite in the dark."

"I'm afraid he saw——"

"Saw what?" asked Arthur impatiently.

"Saw Mr. Geraldyn kiss my hand."

Arthur burst out laughing.

"My dear Bride, what an alarming spectacle. Really you frightened me for the moment."

"I was afraid you would be angry," I faltered; for Lady Rachel's often-repeated remarks about his jealousy were not quite to be forgotten.

"Foolish child," he said, sitting down on a bench and drawing me down also. "Am I such an Othello you dread my resenting so harmless and every-day a gallantry? I suppose Cis was expressing his gratitude for your patience under his ravings."

"I was silly," I said, "but——"

"Very silly to believe all you are told of me," he answered smiling, and sealing his pardon on my lips added:

"There are some women I could not trust out of my sight, and who could madden me with jealousy, but they are very different to you, you shy little white daisy. However, perhaps the Wizard did really piece his facts wrongly, it is rather probable. Never mind him now, I have leave to take you to see the

supper before it is touched. As we shall go in later Jekyll will take some to have a private view."

It was a marvellous sight. An enormous table at least two hundred feet long was spread in the great conservatory. From end to end ran a rippling canal, in which swam live fish, its banks were green with soft moss and ferns, and water-lilies floated on the surface. Its source was in a massive silver fountain, and after traversing the long table it fell in a cascade into a huge marble basin, and was lost to sight among the masses of flowering shrubs. The Prince's seat was above the fountain, nearly a hundred servants were in waiting, some in the royal liveries, a few were in full armour.

Behind the Prince's chair was an arrangement of tables draped in ruby velvet and mirrors, among which a profusion of exquisite plate was displayed, and the mirror reflecting it again and again multiplied the show to an indescribable extent.

From above were suspended the Prince's coronet and initials, the latter worked in gold bejewelled, festoons of flowers were wreathed in every direction, soft rose-coloured light fell on the table from tinted lamps, and embowered as the whole place was with feathery ferns and palms its beauty was indescribable. The signal that the Prince and his party were near caused us to beat a hasty retreat.

I wondered no more of the royal family had come to enjoy such splendour, and said as much to Mrs. MacNab.

"Bless your heart! they don't approve, my dear. The Princesses would like it, you may be sure; but the old Queen won't let them come. The brothers are all here, and whisper; I believe the Princess of Wales came on the sly."

Court scandals interested me little. I asked where Lady Rachel and Kathleen were.

"Lady Rachel is either at supper or gambling away. Your sister certainly is with the Prince's party."

"How could she go? I thought commoners would all go later."

"Oh, as the Queen of hearts she takes high rank, my dear. Florizel is an avowed squire of dames, you know. I'm starving; I wish I were a peeress. How lovely good the supper looked; I hope they will not stay there all night."

She chattered on, her words flowing like the rippling of the artificial waterfall, and I answered now and then, and puzzled myself about the Wizard, for my Irish blood made me just the least bit superstitious.

At length our turn came to sup. Larry, dissappointed of Lady Rachel, insisted on my going in with him to teach him the pattern of good manners, and I was glad enough of his merry companionship.

He was as much astonished as I had been at my first grand party, mistook the gold fish for toys, tried to taste many unknown things, and ended by vowing the ices burnt his mouth, and enjoyed himself all the more for his mistakes, for being unacquainted with such elaborate dishes he was quite in the dark as to the proper condiments, and added sugar to savouries and salt to sweets recklessly.

"Sure, Bride, whist now. I've something to tell you, just a bit of a saycrit," he said as we rose from table.

"What is it, now?" I asked, for he looked mysterious.

"Wait till I talk to ye, child," he replied, and was quiet till we found a secluded corner. "Now, then, what do you think I saw Kathie at?"

"Oh, how can I tell? She is past all my comprehension."

"I'll tell you, now. I was getting a little stroll for myself all alone in the garden, for it's not in the saloons, and what do I see but Miss Kathie coming along as nately as you please, and who with her but the Prince of Wales himself. So, thinks I, two's company, three's flummery. Maybe they'll like my society better if I ain't there; but all the same I'd like to see what they're at. So with that I hid behind a tree till they went one side the hedge, and I marches myself up the other side. There were they as comfortable as two

peas in a pod on a little seat, and she answering his fine speeches as unconcerned as if he were any one. By-and-by he got rather too friendly, for he'd got some champagne under his waistcoat, and small blame to him, for it's powerful fine liquor. I began to wonder whether I'd have to be punching his head."

"Oh, Larry," I said dismayed, "I hope you did not do anything so rash."

"Ah! not at all; do you think I've no discretion? Listen, now. Kathie just treated him as coolly as might be till presently he stood up, and said he wanted her to teach him Irish, and what did Arrah-na-Pogue mean? 'The girl of the kiss,' says she. 'And I'm going to have one,' he answers, catching her round the waist, but she slips out of his hold like an eel out of a frying-pan. 'Keep your distance, sir,' says she, cocking her nose in the air as proud as a peacock. 'I'm your Prince, my pretty one.' 'Well, sir, does that give you a right to take by force what is refused you?' 'Of course it does,' he says pat enough. 'Dear me,' says Kathie, looking as innocent as a cosset lamb. 'I'm very ignorant of town ways; I thought only the highwaymen did that.' With that he had another try, and she just waited till he was in reach and then gave him such a box on the ears as made them ring again, and before he recovered himself she was away."

"What did you do?"

"Says I to myself, 'Larry, child, to snatch a kiss from a pretty girl is not mortial sin, or there'd be poor chance for yourself, I'm thinking, and to get a box on the ears for doing that same is no great matter;' but one would rather not be seen, so down dropped I among the shrubs, just as close as a hare in her seat, and the Prince comes out a second after, and up and down and everywhere he looks, and presently says out loud, laughing a bit, 'Egad, I'm thankful no one was near to see that! I didn't get the best of it.' 'That's true for you,' thinks I, but he went on, 'What a girl of spirit it is, but, egad, I admire her all the more; she needn't have hit quite so hard, though,' and off goes he."

"Well, I think you were very prudent, Larry; but you'd better not tell any one else but Arthur."

"Is it I go talking about my sister? not I, Bride. Sure a kiss is not out of the way here. I fancy, for all I have seen to-night, it beats county Wexford."

"I don't know much about their ways," I replied. "I have been out but little."

"And maybe, Arthur would just as soon you didn't, I fancy, Bride. He thinks all the world of you now, and he's a fine fellow. Wait till you hear all the regiment say of him; they can tell you stories by the hour of his doings in the fighting, and they just are proud of him

too. But I must go, Bride, I am going to dance with that little shepherdess. Maybe I'll take her in the garden, and ask her to teach me town manners."

He rose to leave me, but, turning suddenly, said mysteriously, "Bride, have you seen the Wizard? I believe he's just Old Nick himself. He told me all about how I—— Ah! well, never mind what exactly; but how could he tell?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"So farewell, scene of mirth and masking,
Now almost a bygone tale,
Beauties late in lamplight basking,
Now by daylight dim and pale."

"And matters are just as they were," said Arthur to me the morning succeeding the masquerade before leaving the bedroom.

"Are you sure? I couldn't say a word to Kathleen last night."

"I am certain. I took Larry to the club for half an hour; the rivals were there, Headland very sulky, and Cis despondent, and old Portishead button-holed me to ask me what I thought they were made of. I swear he is in love with the little plague himself, he is so anxious for the match. I recommended him to run away with her and marry her by proxy, after the fashion royal bridals used to be arranged, and at last was weak enough to undertake to sound Kathleen, and try and ascertain her views."

"I hope you will be successful in your mission."

"That means you doubt it, madam. I'm of opinion I must have had a good deal of champagne before I undertook it, for I am nearly sure she will be too many for me."

"After breakfast you can try your diplomatic powers; let me be present."

"Faith, yes. I'll not try my luck alone; she might box my ears too."

We had plenty of fun over the late breakfast. Larry's experiences were specially amusing. I inquired if he had had a lesson in town manners.

"Ah, that reminds me," said he. "Sure it's the queerest thing. I took a young lady, never mind which, for I don't know myself, by the way, and said I, when we were friendly together, that I'd never kissed an English girl, and I would like to know if it was all the same as an Irish. Well, it did not seem to offend her, and after a bit, sure I did try, and more than once to make sure about it, you know; and would you believe it? when we got under a light, I took a look in her pretty face, and I'd kissed all the colour away!" A general laugh greeted this story.

"Did you never find out how the ladies' complexions grew before?" cried Kathie.

"I never belaved it," said Larry. "What a desaving world it is. Why, half of their cheeks, then, are like the coloured calico patterns mother says are no good, for they won't wash. Is that why you took a wife in the country, Arthur? What will I do at all, if ever I want to marry a town lady, to find out if her colours are fast?"

"Apply last night's test, man, I should

think," said Arthur. "Now, Miss Kathleen, apropos of marriage, I want a word with you."

"Yes, sir," said Kathie demurely, lifting a pair of round wondering, innocent eyes, like a child's.

"I am really in earnest, Kathleen."

"Quite right, it is a serious subject," quoth Kathie, as grave as a judge, though there were dimples round her lips.

"What I want to ask you, Kathleen, as Larry will, I am sure, cede me the right of elder brother in this matter——"

"With the greatest pleasure in life," said Larry promptly.

"What I want to ask you, Kathleen——"

"I think I've heard that before," she interposed.

Arthur would not smile, but went on as if he had not heard:

"Do you ever mean to decide between these two suitors, or are you going to keep them hanging indefinitely about you?"

"Is it town fashion for the lady to say yes, or no?" asked Kathie.

"Certainly," replied Arthur, thinking she might expect it to be referred to her father.

"What, before the gentleman asks me?" inquired Kathie demurely.

Arthur could keep his countenance no longer, and laughed, as she intended him to do; but checking himself went on, "You

know, Kathleen, you would be asked quickly enough if you gave the chance."

"Sure I'm only a raw country girl," said she. "Teach me what I'll do. Is this the way to begin, now?" She dropped into a chair, and with the most absurd affectation of simplicity, twisting her apron and hanging her head, sang:

> "Oh, dear, what can the matter be?
> Oh, dear, what will I do?
> Nobody coming to marry me,
> Nobody coming to woo."

"By-the-bye, now, Arthur, you never told me whom you want me to marry."

"I don't want you to marry any one," he said. "And I think it's a bold man that ventures to take such a contrary mortal; but I want you to know your own mind, and give over plaguing these unfortunate men."

"Which of them?"

"Who said the sweetest things to you last night?"

"Lord Verular did, I think," answered Kathleen gravely. "But is not he rather old for me?"

"Kathie, you would drive a saint wild," said Arthur laughing.

"That won't affect you, then," she retorted saucily. "Come, now, do let me be; sure you don't know how to play the stern parent one bit, Arthur; I'm not the least morsel afraid of you."

"I wonder if anything on earth would frighten you?" he answered. "I wash my hands of you, Kathie, and will recommend all your suitors to apply direct to——"

"Mr. Kavanagh," announced the footman.

There was a sudden pause of astonished expectation, and in walked Uncle George, looking as dapper and well-appointed as ever, in a suit which most artfully combined a certain old-fashioned style with the newest mode, and was remarkably becoming to him.

Need it be said that after the first surprise we all vied in greeting him warmly, every one talking at once, till he was safely seated in an arm-chair, and we clustered round him, Kathie perching on the arm with her arms round his neck, and I on a hassock at his feet.

"So you have not forgotten the old man among all your gaieties, young ladies?"

"Of course not, you dear, darling old uncle," cried Kathie. "It's like a bit of home to see you. Ah! how is everybody and everything, and the Knight?"

"All well, my dears. Your mother as pleased as may be because she will be a grandmother, maybe, some of these days."

"Now, sir, that I may have a chance of a word," said Arthur, "tell me if I have taken proper care of my wife, and you are satisfied with her looks?"

"She looks blooming and charming," said uncle, giving me a kiss. "And so far, Nephew

Gordon, if appearances are not deceitful, I should judge you were not of my opinion about the marriage state?"

"Faith! I'm not, then," said Arthur decidedly.

"Well, well, I'm not sorry for it, lad. I dreaded rather how this little country flower would bear transplanting to a London garden," replied uncle, with a twinkle in his eye.

A sudden revelation broke on our minds of last night's mysteries. "The Wizard!" cried Arthur and I simultaneously. "How could we be so blind?"

Uncle chuckled away merrily. "Well, I don't know, young people, but I never enjoyed myself better. Nephew Gordon, you were within an ace of calling me out, and to see Larry's mouth opening with astonishment, till lock-jaw seemed inevitable, when I reminded him of a trifle or two. And as for Kathie——"

"Oh, be quiet, now; sure, I never told any one your nonsense, so whisht, now, do."

"And a good many more were taken aback," said Arthur laughing.

Uncle laughed too, then said:

"Now, girls and boy, you must never let the secret out, mind; sure I told a good many folks of what they did not want remembering, I'm thinking; but it was irresistible."

"Now, uncle, I'm going to quarrel with you," I said. "You believed it was myself Mr. Geraldyn admired, did you not?"

Uncle looked guilty.

"Well, to tell you the truth, niece, any one might have been misled by his fine speeches, and I did not find out who he was at first, and after all, my dear, women and cards are not to be trusted."

"Then when you did know better I suppose you thought you would provoke me?" said Arthur smiling.

"Precisely, my good nephew. To see your head gradually going in the air till your indignation broke out in such withering sarcasm; it was splendid."

"I suppose, sir, you never considered that you might have aroused such doubts that, like the Moor, I should go home and sacrifice this poor little Desdemona in my fury?"

"Instead of kissing her in an arbour," retorted uncle slily.

"Oh! I will hold my peace," said Arthur. "I am not at all convinced that you have no commerce with unhallowed arts; or else, like Argus, you have a thousand eyes."

"A thousand eyes!" cried Larry. "Sure can one see him in town?"

"I think, Master Larry, you took more pains not to acquire knowledge than most men have undergone to attain a good education."

"Ah, well!" said Larry, "I never found the books taught me how to ride, or shoot, or fight, or court the girls, and that's the sweetness of life after all."

"Modest youth! How flattering to the ladies to come last in his ideas of happiness," said uncle drily. "Nephew Gordon, at what hour will your mother permit me to pay my respects to her?"

"I know she will be at home until four o'clock," I said. "Uncle, you have never told us when you came to London?"

"Oh, a few days since," he answered.

"And never came near us? For shame!" cried Kathie.

"I had to cast the garb of rusticity, my dear, and appear in more fitting guise."

"I wonder one did not find you out," said Arthur, "for you have not been buried in seclusion, by your appearing last night and recognizing so many people."

"To tell the truth, Master Arthur, I should never have tried my *incognito* had I not gathered from Bride's letters that you were indisposed, and not much about, so unlikely to be met; but your looks do not pity you much, lad."

"Oh, I am quite well now; fit for more fighting as soon as may be. I have another fortnight's leave, though."

"I must go to the city to my banker. Are you disposed to accompany me, Nephew Gordon?"

"With pleasure, sir. Larry boy, you had better take your sisters to the park."

"How will I find the way at all?"

"Oh, we know it now," I said. "Come along, Larry; you will see all your last night's partners."

"Ask them what they thought of the Wizard," said Arthur laughing, as he and uncle departed.

Uncle George duly reappeared, and made himself so extremely charming to Lady Rachel that Larry was quite left in the cold, and consequently much disgusted.

Uncle accompanied us to the play that night, where we saw Mrs. Siddons, just then in the zenith of her fame. My mother-in-law, who thought the play a convenient place for admirers to gather round her, scarce glanced at the stage, except to say:

"I vow the creature's dress is admirably hung."

But I was carried away out of myself, and could not take my eyes a moment from the great actress, who was playing Lady Macbeth with such wonderful power and skill that she seemed to identify herself so completely with the attractive yet wicked woman, that one could not realize it was all acting, and I forgot all but her tragic life till the curtain dropped, and Arthur wrapped my cloak round me saying:

"You must come back to the world of every day now, Bride. Did you enjoy the play?"

"I don't know. I never saw anything so grand and so sad."

He laughed a little and led me down to the carriage, telling me he was going to one of the clubs to show uncle a little high play. Larry went also, and was much diverted at the fashion of the place, of which he told us next day.

It was a regular gambling house, frequented by young men of family, who went there to indulge their passion for play most systematically. They actually covered their richly-embroidered vests with brown linen aprons, wore nankeen coats such as the footmen used, and fantastically-adorned straw hats, which were a kind of badge of the place and marked the *habitués*. Larry of course knew no one but one of his brother officers, whose presence at the tables vexed Arthur, who was himself, like many more, merely a spectator. The sums of money which changed hands seemed to Larry's inexperienced eyes enormous, and even Arthur remarked that he had seldom seen higher stakes.

"Cis was there, but not playing," Arthur informed me privately, adding, "I hope he is growing wiser, and forswearing all infatuations but one. What says uncle of Kathie's affairs?"

"Shrugged his shoulders, took snuff, and wondered what use it was eschewing marriage, only to have nieces' love-matters to negociate. But he likes it; he will be able to display a little diplomacy."

"Did you ask about Mr. Geraldyn's curious keepsake, and how uncle knew of it?"

"I did, Bride. It seems Cecil went to see poor Power's body brought in, and when the soldiers moved off with it he went to his dead horse and knelt by it a moment, saying aloud, 'Poor Selim! I shall never have your like again; and you saved her life too, my beauty.' And cutting off a lock of the mane, he took a glove from the breast of his uniform and bound it round."

"One of Kathie's gloves, of course?"

"Certainly. It must have staggered Cis when his little romantic weakness was divulged. Uncle was watching him. He says he liked the boy better for loving his horse."

CHAPTER XIX.

"What must it be if thus so fair
'Mid the smok'd groves of Grosvenor Square,
What must it be where Thames is seen
Gliding between his banks of green,
While the rival villas on each side
Peep from their bowers to woo his tide?"

"Now! Is my luck in the ascendant?" said Arthur, as he withdrew the curtains in our room very early on the morning of the water party.

The weather was all that could be desired, a delicious summer day, the sunshine tempered by a light breeze.

We did not start very early, as the return by moonlight was an essential part of the programme.

A very large company were gathered at the place of embarkation, where several large barges, with a whole fleet of smaller boats, were ready to convey the guests.

Lady Rachel knew every one in London, and but for a previous engagement of long standing to a steeplechase near Brighton, we should have had the two Princes, a loss Arthur did not greatly deplore, having, as he said, enough on his hands besides.

Uncle seconded him ably in settling the

various parties in each boat, and at last we were fairly off and floating down the river.

By degrees we left the town behind us, and our way lay among soft meadows gay with wild flowers, or past deep woods sloping to the water till the drooping boughs of the trees swept its surface.

Here and there was a tiny islet surrounded by bulrushes and plumy cane reeds, from among which the little moorhens flew out. The lazy cattle standing knee-deep in the stream just lifted their heads as we passed, and the white swans hardly swam out of our way.

Sweet scents of clover and meadow-sweet filled the air, and the town ladies fell into raptures over everything.

Lady Rachel, seeing her *fête* likely to be a success, was most gracious, and every one seemed enjoying themselves to the utmost.

On we went. A hundred times Arthur was assailed with questions as to our destination, and besought to let the company land in some specially pretty spot; but he was inexorable. At length we reached the place he had chosen, and certainly it justified his selection. There was a little inlet white with water lilies, which grew in profusion, and whole beds of forget-me-nots, blue as children's eyes, clothed the banks. A lovely beech wood came down to the river's edge, and tall, waving bracken hung over, reflecting itself.

We landed among the willows, and ten

minutes' walk among the trees brought us to a little country inn embowered in cherry orchards, where the ripe fruit hung in bright clusters. Under the trees a long table was covered with snowy home-spun linen, and set with quaint ware representing the loves of the shepherds in Arcadia. Great brown Toby jugs frothed with the inn's best ale, and sweet, crisp country loaves, golden butter, and pitchers of thick cream, alternated with piles of fresh fruit. The more solid viands and wines we had brought with us, and the table was quickly covered.

For the younger ones, who preferred more genuine picnic fashion, more cloths were spread on the grass; but Arthur, well acquainted with town ladies' ways, had provided comfortable chairs for those who liked to play at rusticity at their ease.

The scene was very pretty, and the comely hostess, her fat, fair-haired children, and a brood of soft yellow ducklings were picturesque adjuncts to it.

Such a fine company had never before visited the little inn, and landlord and landlady had done their utmost to please their guests, and, with rustic civilities, helped the footmen to attend on us, and amid jests and laughter the good things were consumed.

Mrs. MacNab had regretfully found, after an attempt or two, that she was too fat to sit on the grass, and, declaring it sad to be

so old, placed herself at the table, where her mother merrily ceded her chair to Flora, and joined us at our more primitive repast, dropping on to the turf beside her son with grace and lightness which rivalled Kathleen, who had a kittenish facility for perching herself in odd places.

Lady Geraldyn was, when in the vein, one of the most entertaining of women, for her whole life had been such a succession of changes, and to-day she exerted herself to the utmost to amuse the party among whom she had placed herself.

Tale after tale of foreign life she related, of days spent among the vine countries, where the handsome dark-eyed peasants gathered the grapes with song and laughter, and she herself had been crowned with vine wreathes as queen of the feast, and drawn in on the last load of grapes in a gilt wain drawn by half a dozen cream-coloured oxen. Stories of the southern carnival and its wild fun, and the extraordinary disguises under which ladies were carried off, not unwillingly, by daring gallants under cover of the fun and frolic of the time, when sweetmeats rained down from the windows on the crowd below, who returned the fire with good aim, or every one joined in a wild effort to blow out their neighbours' tapers while their own were kept burning.

Then she told of Russia and its snows, and

wolf-hunting exploits in which she had taken part; firing at the greedy pack who followed them from little sledges, and how, on one occasion, a handsome young attaché was jerked out of the sledge as he fired, and torn to pieces by the horrible creatures in a moment.

She had so bright and graphic a way of telling her stories that we were entranced, and Kathie most of all. With sparkling eyes and parted lips she eagerly drank in every word, and said at last with a sigh:

"Oh, how I envy you, Lady Geraldyn. How I should love such a life."

"You would be fitted for it, my dear," said Lady Geraldyn, looking at her. "Therefore you will be sure to be the square peg in the round hole and live in luxurious idleness, while some little domestic soul who loves her nursery and stillroom best of everything is obliged to travel amid sights which weary her and foreigners whom she hates with a true British hatred. Mont Blanc only reminds her of a well-frosted cake, and amid the orange groves she sighs to be making marmalade. *Telle est la vie.*"

"We have all finished, I believe," said Arthur, "so now, Lady Geraldyn, will you charm us still further with a song?"

"My dear boy, as if an old grannie's cracked voice were fit for anything but to croon to the babies; besides, I have not my guitar."

"That excuse will not serve," he answered, handing it to her.

"Really, Arthur, how came it here? You must practise the black art like the Wizard at the masquerade. I would give my best earrings to know who he was who could remind one of one's little peccadilloes as far back almost as the Deluge."

Passing her fingers over the strings, Lady Geraldyn sang a curious wild air in Polish, which she said she had learnt from the gipsies there; then a Spanish love-song, and half a dozen more quaint uncommon tunes picked in her wanderings and in a variety of dialects.

The last was so sweet and plaintive, I asked for the words.

"It is a Breton lament over a faithless lady-love, and each verse has a refrain something to this effect:

> "There are maidens in plenty, they tell me,
> But I see no face but thine."

"Come, now, a catch for a change," and she struck up:

> "A boat, a boat unto the ferry,"

which every one could join in. A few more glees followed, then Arthur was called on and gave Lovelace's old song,

> "If doughty deeds my lady please,"

and saying he had the privilege of the next choice, invited the ladies Adela and Caroline to favour us. They had well-trained thin voices, and sang some Italian duets with many trills and roulades; then, with a view of pleasing their brother perhaps, named Kathleen as the next performer. She was swinging idly on the low bough of a cherry tree, and had hung twin cherries over her tiny ears for earrings, and fastened a great bunch of the scarlet fruit in the front of her soft India muslin dress.

"Provoking child!" whispered Lady Geraldyn to me. "She is prettier with her cherries than any one else with rubies. Really it should not be permitted to be so attractive; and that great soft black hat is positively reprehensibly becoming."

"What will I sing?" asked Kathie.

"As we are out of Ireland let us have a rebel ditty," said Mr. Geraldyn. "Unfortunately, like the Jacobites, the wrong side always seemed to have the best tunes."

"Is it a loyal woman like myself you expect to know such things?" asked Kathie.

"I won't impeach your loyalty," remarked Arthur, "but I'll swear to your rebelling against all lawful authority, specially mine."

"If you take away my character like that I may as well be a White Boy at once" [illegible]

she began the favourite air of the disaffected, "The wearin' of the green." Other voices took up the chorus:

> "'Tis the most distressful country
> That ever yet was seen,
> For they're hanging men and women too
> For the wearing of the green."

And as the last notes died away Kathleen said gaily:

"Now if I'm sent to jail for the singing of seditious ballads, I do call you all to witness that Mr. Geraldyn incited me and is accessory before the fact."

"I am ready to bear my share of the punishment with you, Miss Kavanagh," he answered.

She vouchsafed no answer, but suddenly named Lord Headland as the next vocalist. He complied; and indeed singers were plenty, for the Prince of Wales was so charming a musician that no dinner was ended without many songs, and any one with the smallest pretensions to voice and ear cultivated their gifts.

"Honest Boniface, the host, is entranced. Let us ask him for a song. That well-rounded waistcoat should contain a good sturdy voice," said Lady Geraldyn presently.

With some bashfulness the worthy man confessed to "sometimes turning a bit of a tune to please the missus." And being further

pressed, cleared his throat and in good time and tune sang :

"I saw a ship sailing on the sea,
As deeply laden as she might be;
But not so deep as in love I am,
For I care not whether I sink or swim.

"I leant my back unto an oak,
Thinking to find a trusty tree;
But first it bent, and then it broke,
And so did my false love to me.

"I put my hand into a thorn,
Thinking the fairest rose to find;
I pricked my finger to the bone,
And left the beauteous flower behind.

"I wish, I wish, but 'tis all in vain,
I wish I could get my heart back again;
I'd lock it up in a silver chest,
And fasten it with a golden chain."

The song was unknown to us all, and received such applause as quite overwhelmed the honest landlord. Lady Geraldyn made him dictate the words, and wrote them in a pocket-book.

Just then the good wife, who had been absent, appeared, leading a milk-white cow adorned with a wreath of oak leaves and marigolds, and courtesying to the company, the dame begged to offer us a syllabub, in which she added, with a little pride, "Some folks accounted her to be skilful."

Kathie sprang from her perch on the bough, and ran up to pat the pretty animal.

"Sure what an age it is since I've milked

a cow!" she cried. "I must now, just for luck, for there's not a black hair on her, the darlint, so she'll bring me the good fortune. Give me the stool, now."

"But, miss," protested the landlady, "Snowy is an onaisy creature with strangers, and pernicketty about being milked by a fresh hand, and a fine young madam like yourself cannot know such work like us simple bodies."

For all answer, Kathie coaxed the cow with a few soft words, and taking the great china bowl which contained the material for syllabub from the astonished dame's reluctant hand, sat down and milked the creature skilfully and successfully; for indeed she had played the milkmaid hundreds of times at home.

"Saw one ever the likes of that!" ejaculated the landlord, scratching his head in open-eyed wonder. "Railly, miss, you're the purtiest and cliverest dairymaid as iver trod the grass like a queen, as you ought to be, if it goes by looks."

The rustic compliment delighted Kathie, who acknowledged it graciously, and raising her well-frothed syllabub bowl, placed it on the table, refusing all help but the good man's.

"Since I was in Trianon and saw Marie Antoinette herself playing the *belle fermière* I have seen no such a pretty sight," said the courteous Duke of Portishead. "Miss Kavanagh, is there anything you cannot do?"

"Oh, sir," she replied, dropping a rustic courtesy, "sure a country maid can always milk a cow."

And retreating, she caught up a little flaxen-haired toddler of two years old and began to feed him with cake. A number of children and a few old grannies had long been peeping over the hedge at "the gentlefolks."

The other young ladies followed Kathleen's example, and amused themselves distributing a liberal share of good things among these onlookers, to their great delight, and then the company by degrees broke up into small knots of twos and threes.

Some went on the water, others wandered into the wood, which had very tempting shady paths and deep glades.

CHAPTER XX.

"Go, then; 'tis vain to hover
Thus round a hope that's dead
At length my dream is over,
'Twas sweet, 'twas false, 'tis fled.
Farewell, since nought it moves thee
Such truth as mine to see,
Some one who far less loves thee
Perhaps more blest will be."

The evening was drawing on now, but no one seemed at all inclined to think of going home, for it was so warm and lovely still, and the moon was not yet risen.

The *fête* had been a complete success. Lady Rachel, overwhelmed with compliments on her skill in arranging it, was entertaining her guests in most gracious fashion, and quite believing, apparently, she had managed it all from the first; but that was unimportant, as Arthur cared nothing if all went smoothly.

Presently the chance came which Mr. Geraldyn had waited so long for.

Accident brought Kathleen and myself into the wood with Cecil and his brother, Lord Headland, and another young lady.

Suddenly Mr. Geraldyn whispered to me:

"Remember your promise to help me."

"What shall I do?" I asked.

"Detain Headland and give me five minutes, start: the wood is nearly dark."

I was not ready in such matters, but somehow managed what was required of me by entangling my dress in a bramble. Bill Geraldyn's aid was more vigorous than useful in freeing it; possibly he wished to aid his brother at expense of my fineries. Anyhow, by the time Lord Headland had rendered more efficient assistance, the other two had turned a corner and were lost to view.

Of course we followed them, but, as Mr. Geraldyn had probably ascertained previously, there were many paths, and we failed to overtake them.

Lord Headland was evidently not pleased, but he was far too well-bred to show it openly, and continued his conversation as if nothing had occurred to upset his equanimity, until at last I proposed returning to the inn, as our other companions had also deserted us, and we could hear their gay voices dying away in the distance.

So we wandered back again, and though we saw nothing of my sister and her companion, we found others just returned from boating, and actually playing cards under the cherry trees.

Arthur came up to me and said, "I believe I have fulfilled all my duties at last. Will you come on the river with me for half an hour, Bride?"

"I should love to," I answered, and we went down together to the willow bank.

"Stay here, sweetheart," he said. "I can

go for a boat more quickly alone, and I will come for you." I heard him pushing his way through branches and briars for a minute or two.

He was soon out of hearing, and I sat dreamily listening to the ripple of the water, and the occasional cry of a moorhen from the reeds, while over my head a bat flitted swiftly to and fro.

Presently I heard the plash of oars, and, making sure it was Arthur, felt half vexed at hearing voices also, for I wanted to go with him alone, and fancied he also would not wish for any one else.

But in another moment the boat was shot deftly into the little creek, almost under my feet, and I saw its occupants were Kathleen and Mr. Geraldyn. I half rose, meaning to call to them, but stopped irresolutely; if he had not yet spoken, an interruption might be fatal to his chance, for I knew his rival was seeking for them, and my appearance might give wayward Kathie an excuse for once more putting him off if she were so minded.

She leant out of the boat to gather the water lilies; she had thrown away her cherries, and now fastened two or three lilies in their place, and in the coils of her uncovered hair.

"You look like a water-nymph," Mr. Geraldyn said admiringly.

"When did you see one?" she asked roguishly.

He made no answer, but gathered another flower, and in giving it her caught her hand and held it fast.

"Do you want the flower back?" she said carelessly, pretending not to guess what he meant.

"No," he said, "I want you, Kathleen—my queen, my heart's darling, my one desire."

My irresolution had lasted too long, I could neither speak to them now, nor move, for fear of disturbing them. Mr. Geraldyn had both her hands now, and was kneeling at her feet; the moon had risen, and in its light I could see his fair face was very pale, and his eyes shining with an eager light, as with intense earnestness he went on:

"Kathleen dearest, I cannot offer you wealth or position yet; but I have a fair opening, and, if only for a while, my love would make you content to be poor, I would win fame and wealth for you, darling. Only say you will be mine."

She drew her hands away coldly and deliberately from his grasp, but said nothing, though on her mobile face I could see rapid changes of expression, and her bosom rose and fell with her quick-drawn breath.

In Cecil's soft voice, which he never raised, there was a ring of bitter pain, as, seeing she would not speak, he burst out again:

"Kathleen, why do you withdraw your hands from me? Ah, have you no feeling? Must my love be like this river, beating itself for ever with hopeless force against a rock? My God! Kathleen, do you realize how I love you? Sleeping or waking I see but you. Your face comes between me and all I ever cared for in life. Hope, ambition, almost honour itself, I would give up to win you. Tell me, do you not care for me, if ever so little?"

"I am grateful to you for saving my life, and I like you very much as a friend," she replied in cold measured tones.

"Put that paltry obligation aside, you did as much for me," Cecil said scornfully. "But you had a thousand times better have left me to my fate if you are going to wreck my life thus. I would gladly exchange with Power, for at least he died for you."

Something in that remembrance softened Kathie's mood for an instant.

"Why should we bandy sharp words?" she said. "I cannot be what you wish, but let us be friends."

"Friends!" he cried indignantly. "I ask for bread and you would give me a stone. Can you understand me so little that you believe I could quietly stand by to see you another's wife when I would risk heaven to win you? Not I. I swear I will put the seas between us or kill him."

This passionate excitement frightened me, but Kathleen answered sarcastically, "A generous way of securing my happiness to murder my husband! it savours of the dog in the manger, Mr. Geraldyn."

The taunt goaded him beyond self-control. He caught her hands again with a force very foreign to his usual debonair courtesy, and said between his teeth, "Will you swear that you love another man better than myself?"

For a moment even her courage quailed before the fire of his eyes, then recovering herself, she said, "I will not swear to anything, for I fail to see by what right you demand such a thing. Unhand me, sir, you are hurting me."

On her delicate white skin the pressure had left some marks, and Cecil seeing them was desperately vexed with himself, and besought her to pardon his roughness.

"Put me on shore, please," was the only reply.

"I will not," he said, his mood changing under her scornful glance once more. "I know you better than you know yourself, Kathleen, and I tell you that for ambition, wealth, and a title you are going to wed a man you care for less than for me."

"How dare you insult me thus?" she cried angrily. "You would not do it if I were not in a measure at your mercy in this boat."

"You say right, you are at my mercy," he

exclaimed triumphantly. "Look at these keys, they belong to the boat's chains, every boat is safely padlocked but this."

"Well, what of that?" she replied, still undismayed.

"Only this, fair lady," he said, striking his oars in the water. "I shall row you far away to-night where no one will trace us, and to-morrow you must marry me, for all the world will believe it an elopement."

With a few vigorous strokes he left the creek, and I was on the point of discovering myself, and frustrating his wild project, which he was clearly going to execute under the influence of his temporary madness of passion; but before he could reach midstream, with a scornful ringing laugh, Kathleen exclaimed:

"You reckon without your host, sir, if you think fifty yards of water will keep a girl in your boat who can swim like a wild duck."

And with a sudden spring she was in the water, striking out boldly for the shore.

For an instant Mr. Geraldyn seemed bent on following her; but with a couple of strokes of his oars brought the boat alongside, and bending down lifted her up by main force, and without a word pulled to the bank, and handed her out. I thought she was going to leave him with the same bitter silence which spoke far more than words; but with humble solicitude he tried to wring the water from her dripping dress.

"Let me alone," she exclaimed. "What do you suppose I care for a plunge into a river on a summer's night? I shall go to the inn and say it was an accident, as, thank Heaven, no one saw what your folly drove me to."

"Will you ever forgive me?" he asked, detaining her as she moved away.

"Never," she said. "Leave me alone. If you dare to follow me or breathe a word of what has passed I will never speak to you again, even were it on your death-bed!" Once more she had gone too far.

Catching her to him with a sudden movement, he kissed her a dozen times ere she could escape. "There," he cried, "go to your richer admirer with my kisses fresh on your lips."

With all her strength she dashed him away, and stood a moment, her face glowing with superb anger; then between her teeth she hissed out, "Coward, I hate you!" and flying through the trees was gone in an instant.

Cecil Geraldyn made no attempt to follow her; he threw himself on the ground in such utter misery, that, angry as I felt with him, I pitied him too. But in his restless pain he was not still long. Rising, he sprang into the boat, and rowed it furiously back towards the place where the other craft were moored.

And then recovering myself I began to marvel as to where Arthur could be.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Love still has something of the sea
From which his mother rose,
No time his slaves from doubt can free,
Nor give their thoughts repose.

"At first disdain and pride they fear,
Which if they chance to 'scape,
Rivals and dangers soon appear
In a more cruel shape."

I SAT wondering whether to go to seek for Arthur, or remain as he had bid me; the instinct of obedience to his wishes prevailed, and I had not long to wait.

A few minutes later a boat came swiftly up the river, and I heard him calling my name, and ran down to the water's edge.

"I am so sorry to have kept you waiting so long," he exclaimed. "Did you think yourself shamefully neglected, sweetheart?"

"Oh no," I replied, "only I wondered what detained you."

"The strangest thing; I cannot fathom it," he went on, as he settled me in the boat. "When I reached the boats which the landlord had taken down to a proper mooring-place a little way off, I found each one secured by a strong padlock. I thought it extra care on the part of the boatmen, who were gone to supper, and could not blame them, though it

was vexatious to be thus delayed. But going back towards the inn I met one returning, who swore they had been left only fastened by their chains through the rings. He came down with me at once, and just as we were examining them Cis Geraldyn came up, rowing at racing speed, and in so strange a mood that I should have thought him drunk had I not remarked he touched neither wine nor food, but sent plate and glass away at dinner-time, only pretending to eat and drink."

"What did he say about it?"

"I could make nothing coherent out of him, but that if I would go he would see to it; so, not to keep you longer, dear, I took him at his word."

"Row from under the banks, Arthur; some one may hear, and I can explain it all."

"You, Bride?" Arthur said amazed, and bending to his work with a few powerful strokes he brought the light boat from near the land, and we were soon round the next bend of the river, where a pretty group of willow-crested islets form a convenient resting-place.

"Now, little one, only the fishes can listen," Arthur said, catching a drooping willow bough to steady the boat, for the current ran strong.

In a few words I told my tale, which surprised him not a little.

"This escapade was planned before we

started, and Cis must have brought the padlocks from London. On my word, it was a clever scheme, for who could foresee such a failure? Not one woman in a thousand would have spirit or courage to plunge into the river, even if she could swim."

"I really believe you admire him for his wild ideas," I exclaimed.

Arthur laughed a little as he said, "I am afraid I am not as shocked as a sober married man should be, Bride; and I rather suspect you are not very angry either with him for losing his head in his red-hot love for Kathleen."

"But supposing he had succeeded in the attempt?"

"They would have married as he said, and after a few battles-royal have settled down well enough; and I am by no means sure, little wife, that Cecil did not hit the mark in saying she prefers him, only is blinded by ambition."

"Oh, Arthur, can you think anything so dreadful?" I cried reproachfully.

"Women and goslings are queer things to shoe, as uncle says, Bride dear. I do not believe it ever entered your head whether I had a shilling to my name, but Kathleen has tasted the pleasures riches can give, and does not yet know how soon they can grow wearisome; though truly I believe a life such as Lady Geraldyn has led would suit her a thousand

times better than the sameness of rich monotonous dignity."

"But she must know who she loves."

"In Kathleen pride and ambition are a pretty strong balance, I fancy, though I cannot but think such hot courtship was the most likely to touch her heart. She always reminds me of some beautiful wild forest creature, that must be caught and tamed by force. She may yet relent."

Arthur took up his oars as he spoke, and I said regretfully:

"It is so lovely here; must we go back at once?"

"I am anxious about that boy, Bride. In the excitable, overstrung mood he is in, and sore, too, from his defeat, I dread mischief may arise between him and Headland. A word or look misconstrued might end in bloody work. I have known many a fatal duel for less."

We were making rapid way as he spoke, the light boat flying along as he put his full strength to the oars. As we neared the shore he paused a moment, and said:

"Bride, I may want your help. Will you give it me?"

"Certainly, but how?"

"I can hardly tell, but in his present state of mind a man will have little influence on Geraldyn; but a woman might, and he has liked you from the first. Should you be

afraid to go back in a boat with him? Many are planning to return in pairs."

I did not like the prospect, but knew Arthur would not trust me if there were risk. Seeing me hesitate, he said kindly:

"I will not ask you, dear, if you dread it; but for his mother's sake I must do my best for him."

Ashamed of my cowardice I said, "No, no, I do not mind; only remember, I am not ready-witted or quick."

"Bride, you undervalue your own tact, and your shy kindness is more likely to touch a man's better side than any cleverness."

We went back to the inn, where twenty different versions of Kathleen's accident were told us at once; but she herself had just reappeared from the house, the motherly landlady having dried her wet clothes and ironed her dress, so that no traces of the mischance were left. I soon found she had said next to nothing, and Mr. Geraldyn's name was not connected with the matter, but it was concluded she had slipt in, while bending over rashly for water-lilies, and she herself laughingly declared it was very refreshing, and a lovely night for a swim.

Refreshments were being partaken of previous to our departure, and I was glad to see Kathleen drinking hot chocolate, for she looked pale, although her eyes shone like stars, and she scorned all idea of taking pre-

cautions against ill effects from her wetting, and would not allow Lady Rachel to make any alteration in the plans, with regard to a supper-party at the duke's on their return to London.

Mr. Geraldyn was leaning against a tree, apparently taking no heed of Kathleen; but after a while I missed him. Presently Arthur came to me hastily and whispered:

"Geraldyn will not get to London without affronting Headland past bearing, if they go in the barge as is settled; already I have had all my work to keep the peace. You only can do anything, Bride."

I felt very helpless, but determined not to fail him said, "I will try at least."

"Come at once; I will give you an opening by asking Flora to go alone with me. Pretend to retaliate by inviting Cecil; he can hardly refuse."

I followed him under the trees, and with extravagant compliments, he began to press Flora to honour him by coming in a little boat with him to town.

"What, one of those cockle-shells?" she cried. "Bless me, do you know what I weigh? I should wreck the boat, and then you'd be drowned, and so should I, or get influenza and have to drink gruel, and have red noses, which would be worse."

"I'll guarantee your safety if you'll only trust me," he said; then with a well-feigned

sigh added, "There was a time, Flora, when you would have been more compliant."

"Ah, don't be silly, now, as if we were not both husbands and wives now, and not boys in Eton jackets, and girls any longer. Oh, what am I saying? You will have me go? Well, well, but I know I'm too heavy, so had not we better take Bride too?" In spite of his real anxiety, Arthur bit his lips to hide a smile at her wonderful confusion of ideas, and whispered something, to which out loud she said:

"Well, there now, you always did get your own way, and it's nice to find an old flame with just a spark left; but what will Bride say to us?"

"That as you two have settled affairs so nicely, I shall not be behindhand, and shall find myself a beau also, if any one will pity a deserted wife."

I tried to say this in Kathie's saucy fashion, and pretended to look over my fan, as several gentlemen courteously offered themselves, and consider their respective merits. Fortunately I could assign a reason for refusing each in turn, as I chanced to have noticed the ladies who had a better claim on their services.

"Mr. Geraldyn," I said at last, "as your sister is carrying off my husband, the least you can do is to take me under your protection, as you seem to have no special engagement."

He was watching Kathleen now so intently that my address startled him, and he answered almost at random:

"Mrs. Gordon, you do me too much honour; but—but I am going—I mean, I thought of going—in one of the barges."

Womanlike, I was a little nettled at his refusal, and said pettishly:

"Oh, very well, Mr. Geraldyn. Pray let no request of mine interfere with your plans."

"Niece Bride, if I were but younger I would be proud to be at your service, as manners seem changed since my day," said Uncle George drily. "Twenty years ago a lady's lightest caprice was law to any man."

The words caught Mr. Geraldyn's wandering attention as uncle meant them to do.

"Mrs. Gordon," he exclaimed, "a thousand pardons. I hardly knew what I was saying. Will you, indeed, let me row you? I will hasten to secure a boat if Mr. Kavanagh will bring you."

He left the orchard just as Kathleen came towards us leaning on Lord Headland's arm, and he looking proud and satisfied, was whispering to her, bending till his lips almost brushed her hair.

Cecil looked back once and paused, but to my relief hastened on.

Uncle whispered as we followed:

"Niece, I make you my compliments. You are an accomplished actress."

"Explain yourself, uncle."

"Do you think I am blind, my dear? Do I not know my world, child? I guessed at once that good fellow, Arthur, is Quixotic enough to take other folks' matters to heart, and was bent on saving that Geraldyn boy from himself and preventing the imminent duello, so uses his wife's influence in hopes it may be as powerful over Cecil as he finds it personally."

"Uncle, you must be a wizard, in very truth. Why, you have been at cards for hours. How did you know so much?"

"Hush, you incautious woman! Why, it was plain as a pikestaff. Kathie has set the two fools by the ears somehow, true to her sex's fashion of playing with fire, and Geraldyn would love to let light into the marquis by pinking him through the body. As if that would help his own cause. Well, we were all young once."

"Do you not think Arthur is right to prevent such a dreadful thing?"

"Yes, yes, child. I respect him for trying to hold back his old school-mate from blood-guiltiness when he is hardly answerable for his folly. As a woman has driven him to it a woman may keep him from it. God speed your kindly mission, child. Here are the boats and there is your cavalier, looking as sulky as a stage bravo."

CHAPTER XXII.

"Our captain he fell sick,
And his pulse it beat so quick,
And 'twas all for the love
Of the pretty Peggy, oh!"

Mr. Geraldyn might be sulky, but he was certainly not unmannerly; indeed, courtesy appeared ingrained in his nature, and to women of any age or rank he was politeness itself.

With careful and attentive gallantry he handed me in, arranged the boat cushions to make me as luxurious a reclining-place as he could contrive. Then got out once more to seek another cushion to serve as a footstool for me, and another board to put under it, as there were a few drops of water in the boat, wrapped my furred cloak round me, and put his own coat in the bottom of the boat to keep the night air from my feet, lest I should feel it cold.

Then, when all was to his mind, he rowed off. At first we kept alongside of Arthur and Flora, exchanging a few jests with them, though I had most of the answers to supply on our side.

But Arthur was a far more powerfully-built man than Mr. Geraldyn, and his strength told as he, by degrees, put himself to his work,

and gradually we fell behind. Indeed, Mr. Geraldyn looked pale and worn out, as was not marvellous, for intense emotion tries a man as much as bodily pain.

The great barges came by us next, with red lamps which showed prettily, and their sturdy crew of hired boatmen were singing in one some boat song to which their oars kept time. In the others some of the guests were amusing themselves by glees and catches, and Lady Geraldyn was tinkling her guitar.

I saw Kathleen leaning over the edge with rather a dreamy, far-away look, as she gazed back up the river, and wondered what her thoughts were: but all the smaller boats with their occupants were following, and I had to steer carefully to avoid being run down.

One by one they passed us, for evidently my companion was not willing to exert himself to keep with them—perhaps he was not equal to it. At last, after long silence, he said:

"My suspense is at end, Mrs. Gordon. You can guess my fate, can you not?"

"I am afraid I can; indeed, I am very, very sorry for you."

"Yes," he said sadly, "I am rejected, and I have angered her past all forgiveness."

"Mr. Geraldyn, I can hardly believe that. Kathleen is quick and impulsive. She may have spoken sharp words in a fit of anger; but she is forgiving and generous."

"I deserve all I brought on myself," he went on in the same dull voice, which sounded as if all the fire and hope of youth had died out of it. "Yet even now I am certain I could make her happy, and that some day she will weary of the life she has chosen, and regret the love she has thrown away."

"I cannot allow you to say that, even in your disappointment," I said gently, for I was very grieved for him. "No one can realize another's strength of affection. If she marries Lord Headland, he may love her as well as you could."

I felt almost cruel, and Mr. Geraldyn winced under the words, but replied:

"Thank you for the reproof. I am a vain fool to value myself above a man of whom I know no wrong. Only he has admired others, and for me Kathleen has been the first; she will be the last."

"You can hardly answer for that. It may seem so now, but time brings changes."

"Would you choose again if Arthur died?" he said curtly. "Will Tracy find another love?" I could not gainsay him, and he went on, after a pause, "Some men can change their fancies as easily as their clothes. I wish to heaven I were one of them. There is no greater curse to a man than to feel he has risked his whole heart on one cast—and lost."

Back from the barge floated soft on the

night air the ballad that the landlord had sung, and which Lady Geraldyn had caught up.

"I hate that song," Mr. Geraldyn said; "it haunted me like a spell all day; there is too much home-truth in it."

His colour went and came, and I could see he was working himself up into an excited state, and I felt half frightened. He began to row irregularly, sometimes making the boat dash along, leaving a white track of foam, at another moment hardly pulling at all. And to my other doubts was added some apprehension as to whether he was a safe boatman, for the little skiff rocked rather ominously under his violent exertions.

Presently he broke out again passionately, as if talking to himself:

"Why should I let my life be wasted thus, and hers too? I will save her from her error. She shall be mine yet, if I have to drag her to the altar. She will thank me for it some day."

"Mr. Geraldyn," I said, with as much dignity as I could manage, "you show little respect for the woman you profess to admire, and small courtesy for me in forcing me to listen to such wild words."

But he was past caring for anything at the moment, and answered:

"I cannot make you pretty set phrases now; I have lost all that made life worth

living. But I will have my revenge. Headland shall not be able to swallow the next insult I put on him, unless he would be looked on as a coward. He shall never live to call her wife."

It was clear he was losing all self-control, and I realized that, probably from long strain of mind and body, he was fevered and almost light-headed, for I remembered Flora had said he had hardly eaten, nor, she thought, slept for weeks.

The other boats were far away. What should I do?

He was rowing quickly now, and said no more for a few minutes; but soon, resting on his oars again, exclaimed:

"Why should I not kill him? What does it matter what I do? It is easy for you to preach patience and self-control when the matter touches you not at all, or perhaps you are glad Kathleen has shown so much worldly wisdom. But her triumph shall be short; Headland will not live to give her the coronet her heart is set on. Heart? I should say vanity. She is cold and heartless as a beautiful statue, or I must have won some regard when I would give my life to gratify her fancy."

"Be silent, sir," I cried, indignantly. "Your boasted love is mere selfish desire by your own showing, if you would rather ruin Kathie's happiness than let another make it."

He was silent for a minute, surprised, I think, at my unwonted warmth: then with a bitter determination he replied coldly:

"I give you fair warning, and you may repeat my words to all they concern if you choose, that I will be revenged on that false coquette, and her insolent, overbearing admirer. I swear it by heaven and——"

"Hush," I cried, thoroughly shocked. "God forgive you the rash oath you would take."

And suddenly from a conflict of mixed feelings, I burst out crying, and after all it was the best thing I could do.

My foolish tears and womanish weakness recalled Mr. Geraldyn's natural chivalry in an instant.

"Mrs. Gordon, what have I said? Oh forgive me!" he exclaimed earnestly. "What a brute I am to have behaved thus, when you have been an angel of goodness to me. I must be beside myself."

I could not stop my tears directly, he had really frightened me, and seeing their effect, I did not regret it; before I could dry them he was thoroughly softened, and very solicitous for me, and anxious, as men are, who do not yet know how easily women's tears rise to their eyes. However, at length I was myself again, and could answer his petitions for forgiveness by holding out my hand to him, though I could not trust my voice. He said very sadly:

"I do not deserve that you should overlook what I cannot pardon myself for; but it would go hard with me to feel I have forfeited your friendship and Arthur's now."

"I can forgive you your wild words, Mr. Geraldyn," I replied, "for indeed I think you were hardly yourself; but it is on one condition."

"What is it?" he said.

"That you forego your resolve and leave Lord Headland unmolested."

"Ah, you too favour the rich suitor!" he exclaimed, sarcastically.

"That is untrue, and you know it. Should I have helped you to an interview with my sister had I not been impartial? You are as unjust as in accusing Kathleen of falseness, when you have yourself told me she never gave you any special favour."

I think he was ashamed, but still would not give in, though I used all my powers of persuasion to win a promise. At last he said:

"I dare not promise. If I broke my word to you I should be dishonoured for life, and sometimes I am not master of myself. When his looks and words gall me beyond control I feel I must take his life."

The words seemed spoken almost involuntarily, and I could but pity him, and said:

"Indeed, I know you are very hardly tried. With all my heart I regret your trouble, but I

know revenge would only bring remorse. I do wish I could do you any good."

"You have done more than you think," he said gently. "I can speak to you because I know you really feel for me. And my mother, fond as she is of me, will not regret my pain because she will fancy I shall grow indifferent to love, and marry for money, as she hopes now."

His excited mood was over, he had relapsed into the same hoplessness that I had noticed at first when we started, and his colour had given way to ashy pallor. I asked him if he were unwell; but he would not acknowledge even to being tired, and said:

"All that ails me is that every hope, aim, or wish is swept away, and my future is a dreary blank. Since the first hour that I saw your sister she has been so ever-present in my thoughts, and every dream of fame or success has had her so entirely for its object that I have nothing left."

"Mr. Geraldyn, do you remember Ballydorough?"

"How can you doubt it?" he said surprised.

"You never saw Lizzie Walker?"

"Oh, but I did," he said; "I remember her handsome face distinctly on the stair."

"Well, then, having noticed her beauty, you can hardly doubt how Major Tracy loved her, and she was worthy of it. Yet though I

never saw grief like his, he gave himself up to it for but a short half-hour, and then remembered duty."

"And he has lived for duty ever since. But, Mrs. Gordon, from my very soul I envy Tracy. No one ever came between him and the woman he loved. Kathleen will be mine neither in time nor eternity."

"You may never love again," I cried, hoping to stir his courage. "But is a man's life to end for that, and in these days when no one knows how soon he may have to fight for his king and country? At least you have loyalty and a soldier's duty left you."

"And perhaps a soldier's death; and the best chance for me; I shall trouble no one then."

He devoted himself to his rowing and said no more till we were nearing our destination and among the lights and houses, where the white mists lay thick on the water like soft fleeces; pretty as they looked they were damp and cold, and I was glad of my cloak. But Mr. Geraldyn seemed not to notice them, and be abstracted in reverie, rowing almost by instinct rather than will. I also was turning many things over mentally, and said at last:

"Where are you going when we land?"

He looked surprised, and said, "Oh, to the club, or somewhere, I hardly know."

"Come home with me instead," I replied.

"What? and stand the cold contempt of

Lady Rachel's eyes, and meet Kathleen? Impossible!"

"You will see no one but Arthur, the rest are left at Portishead House. We have declined."

"I would rather not," he said wearily. "Do not think me discourteous for refusing: I am not fit for any one's company. I would rather be alone."

But I was not to be so easily put off, for I dreaded another change of temper, and pressed him so much that he gave in, and promised he would accompany me. No more passed till we were in sight of our landing-place, where, leaning forward, he said earnestly:

"Mrs. Gordon, believe me, I am neither ungrateful nor insensible to your goodness; whatever comes, I shall never forget your kindness to-night. I do not wonder Arthur prizes you so."

The other boats had all got in before us, but there had been delay in finding the ladies' wraps and other possessions, so some were still there, and among them Lady Geraldyn.

She greeted us laughingly, but I could detect an anxious tone as she turned to her son, saying:

"Well, Cis, are you coming with me to Portishead House? we are all invited."

"I have an engagement to sup with Mrs. Gordon," he said; adding in rather a vexed

tone, "You were not waiting here for me, I presume?"

Lady Geraldyn could read men like books, and saw something had thrown her usually attentive debonair son off his balance, and made him irritable and suspicious. With a gay laugh she replied:

"Oh, don't take the flattering unction to your soul, Cis. I was waiting for something far more valuable than yourself, sir. My Indian shawl is missing. Ah, now I see Arthur with it."

"Here is the lost treasure, Lady Geraldyn, I believe," Arthur said. "Now, may I claim as reward for finding it the privilege of putting it on the shoulders it graces so well? Ah, Cis, you have brought Mrs. Gordon safely. Will you do me a service and take her home? I shall be detained another half-hour good. Perhaps you have other engagements, though?"

I explained that I had invited Mr. Geraldyn, and indorsing it warmly, Arthur told him he would follow us as soon as he could. A hackney coach was called, and in the momentary delay of fetching it Lady Geraldyn grasped my hand tightly, whispering:

"If you had known my sickening dread of Cis meeting Headland again to-night, you would know how I bless you, Bride Gordon."

We drove off through the streets, which were but dimly lighted then, and my com-

panion was silent, leaning back in the carriage wearily; and in truth it was a very jolting conveyance, smelling strangely of old straw, and I was glad to reach home.

Jervis opened the door, his fellow-servants were in attendance on their mistress.

I led the way up to our own little sitting-room, which was far more homelike in my estimation than the large rooms below.

Jervis followed, I concluded to take my orders for supper; but I observed he looked disturbed, and clearing his voice once or twice said:

"An express has come, ma'am, from 'Ounslow."

"For Mr. Gordon?"

"For Captain Gordon, ma'am, askin' your pardon."

"Captain Gordon? Oh, he is gazetted. How delightful! And the colonel has sent to tell him so."

Jervis looked significantly and dubiously at Mr. Geraldyn, who, catching the glance, said kindly:

"I am afraid that is not quite the reason, Mrs. Gordon; and there is some other intelligence. Do you know anything, Jervis?"

"Well, sir, the soldier did say as it was hintimated they was under horders for Hireland, but I don't know."

Like all news, however long expected, it seemed sudden at last. I stood dumb, and

startled, thinking chiefly of Kathleen, and how I could bear to leave her, or what would be decided about her.

Mr. Geraldyn roused me by saying with sympathy in his voice :

"Mrs. Gordon, you must permit me now to take my leave. This has come to you without warning, and in prospect of so speedy a parting you will have a thousand things to say to Arthur."

"Ah, not at all," I exclaimed. "Sure it's all settled long since. You do not think we would wait till now to decide things? Of course I'm going too!"

Worthy old Jervis positively rubbed his hands with delight, ejaculating, "Really, ma'am? Oh, I am thankful."

"You did not suppose I would let him go alone, and he scarcely over his last wounds yet?" I said warmly.

"But if they are ordered to the front they would not be able to take ladies," Mr. Geraldyn said doubtfully.

"Oh, I know that too," I replied.

"But Mrs. Saville always finds her way to the nearest place, and I shall go too. I am no fine lady, you know; there is little I cannot do with my hands, so I can make shift anywhere."

"Arthur was a fortunate man when he chose you," Mr. Geraldyn answered pleasantly.

"Thank you for the compliment, sir," I replied with a courtesy. "I must take my mantle off; will you make yourself at home?"

Jervis was in the passage as I came from my room again, and said mysteriously:

"Ma'am, I beg pardon for the liberty, but is Mr. Geraldyn ill? He is so unlike himself, and he is shivering with cold."

"He his overtired perhaps, and it was chilly on the water; could you light the fire?"

"What will you please to have for supper, ma'am? there is hexcellent soup ready."

I gave my orders and returned to the sitting-room. Jervis, who probably was shrewd enough to guess pretty correctly how matters stood with the guest, hurried off, and soon a bright blaze was glowing on the hearth.

I took it on myself to fancy it chilly, rather than let Mr. Geraldyn think the fire was lit on his account, but I saw that he was grateful for the warmth, for a reaction was fast setting in, and I began to suspect his bodily discomfort and exhaustion were asserting themselves, and overcoming the keenness of the mental pain.

Soon after Arthur came in with the bright well-satisfied look of a man who feels he has accomplished some undertaking successfully.

"Ah, playing at winter, Bride?" he cried cheerily. "A good idea, by my word; what say you, Cis?" He put his hand kindly on his friend's shoulder and exclaimed:

"Why, my dear fellow, how you are shivering. These confounded river mists play old Harry with a man, if they happen to take him wrong. You are regularly chilled through."

"Oh, it is nothing," Mr. Geraldyn said, trying to answer brightly. "See, Mrs. Gordon has something for you."

Arthur took the dispatch, broke the seal hastily, ran his eyes over the contents, and exclaimed:

"You must pack up, little woman. We go off to Ireland in three days. Here is a private note from Saville, saying if I am not well enough I must be permitted to stay out my leave; and adding, we are not ordered yet on active service. So ladies can go, though of course you will not be included, Bride."

"Of course I will, then," I replied; "and I am very angry that he should think thus of me."

"You can fight it out on the transport, dear, he cannot escape you there," said Arthur, who seemed in high spirits at his news.

"You will be recalled perhaps, Cecil, if there is a chance of an outbreak."

"Very likely," said Mr. Geraldyn, as if he cared little.

Arthur stood by the fire discussing a few military questions with him, and watching him rather intently, then went to the side table to write, and calling to me to mend him a pen and find the sand-box, said:

"Is Cis unwell, or only in the blues?"

"Both, I think; chiefly unwell now by his shivering fits."

"What is to be done for him?"

"Make him eat, if possible."

"Romantic soul! who would cure a broken heart with a beef-steak, as if it were a black eye."

"Better a full grief than a fasting," I replied, and leaving him to his writing, returned to the fireside, where Mr. Geraldyn, determined if possible not to show his increasing indisposition and chilliness, tried to talk as if he were at his ease on the events of the late entertainment.

When supper was ready, Jervis had brought up some of his best wine, and after uncorking it tenderly, left the room as he had been bidden.

"Now, young man, I am going to deal with you," Arthur remarked, coming over to us. "You must have something to warm you at once."

"Oh, let me alone, like a good fellow," Mr. Geraldyn said impatiently. "I want nothing, really."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders.

"Bride, I turn him over to you; having personal experience, my dear, of your summary way of treating refractory patients."

"Gained in nursing you, sir. Very well. Mr. Geraldyn, listen now to your sentence.

I condemn you to remain in that chair by the fire all through supper."

"Mrs. Gordon, I give you my word I'll obey," he said smiling. "I would much rather be left in peace."

"Ah, wait now. You are in a hurry," I said. "You have heard but half. Arthur, give me the little table."

I set it for him in a moment, and went on:

"You gave me your word to obey me, remember, so now you have first to drink this wine and then the soup, and I will have no supper myself till you do it."

"She has you there, I think, Cis," Arthur laughed.

"Oh, Mrs. Gordon, I am indescribably ashamed of giving you this trouble," Mr. Geraldyn exclaimed. "Do let me come to the table."

"I will not alter my conditions, so now you are keeping me hungry by delaying," I returned, glad to rouse him anyhow. "Drink your wine."

"I would swallow it at once if it were poison," he said politely.

"Instead of good Madeira," remarked Arthur. "It's no great punishment to imbibe that, luckily for you, Cis; be thankful it's no worse."

By coaxing and teasing alternately Mr. Geraldyn was made to eat some supper. He laid the blame of his *malaise* on the river fog,

being far too proud to acknowledge any other reason, even to Arthur, whom he little thought knew all his secret.

He was visibly better for my unromantic remedies, and tried to appear quite himself, and join cheerily in the talk over the fire, which he seemed in no hurry to quit. When at last he rose to take leave, declining to have a coach called, Arthur said he would like a stroll, and accompanied him, bidding me go to bed, as I should be busy on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"And if for maid of heavenly worth
A young duke's proffered heart and hand
Be things worth waiting for on earth,
Both are this hour at her command."

"I HAVE secured that young gentleman for the next twelve hours," was Arthur's announcement as he looked into my room on his return.

"What have you done with him?"

"Seen him to bed. He will hardly arise and do battle to-night."

"Did he say anything to you about Kathleen?"

"Not he! We are neither of us members of the Willow Club, and men don't usually confide their woes to their own sex for fear of being roasted."

"What is the Willow Club?"

"A society which once existed where the love-lorn congregated to compare notes as to their heart-broken state, and the cruelties of their respective Lydias and Aramintas."

"Was Mr. Geraldyn better?"

"He was not well. Luckily the shivering came on again enough to give me a pretext for forcing him to go to bed."

"I fancy, Bride, you took him in hand none too soon. A man can't go on without food and sleep both, and worked up to such a strain without a breakdown sooner or later."

"I am glad I could be of any use, for I felt as if some one else would have done much better."

"Such did not seem his opinion. He treated me to such eulogiums of your general charms and virtues, madam, that were I not the meekest of spouses—quite a male Griselda—I should call you to account. I began to think he would propose to elope with you next."

"Had I not better learn to swim at once?"

"I should say he will hardly repeat that experiment," said Arthur laughing. "Was there ever such a womankind as Kathie before or since? How did you get on on your way home, Bride? Seriously, I got so nervous about you, child, I nearly turned back to look for you half a dozen times, fearing I had set you too hard a task."

"I am glad you did not, as it all ended well. He was rather excitable at one time; but I don't think interference would have done any good."

"Well, dear, I felt convinced you were about the only person to do anything. And Lady Geraldyn was intensely grateful; she had been very anxious, poor soul. She is wrapped up in Cis."

Arthur went off to write a few necessary letters, and I was soon asleep; but suddenly my slumbers were broken by a light flashing in my eyes, and a kiss.

"Arthur, do you want anything?" I exclaimed: but it was not my husband, but Kathleen, who stood by my bed.

"Bride, darling, it is a shame to wake you; but I cannot wait till morning to tell you my news. I have accepted Lord Headland."

"Accepted Lord Headland!" I exclaimed. "Already, Kathie?"

"Sure, he's been courting some time," she said laughing.

I had not meant that. A vision of the scene by the riverside, and Cecil Geraldyn's bitter farewell to her, and his white, despairing face rose before me; but after all she could not marry them both, and I could think of nothing but Kathie, my pretty darling, of whom I had always been so proud.

"Wish me joy, Bride," she cried, throwing her arms round me, between tears and laughter.

"I do, I do, my own darling," I said, giving her a hundred kisses. "Oh, may you be as happy as the day is long, mavourneen, and never know pain nor sorrow. Oh, Kathie, my bird, do you love him dearly? As much as I do Arthur?"

"It is not in me, dear, to love any man so," she said carelessly. "Oh, I like him very much, and I'm quite happy."

"What on earth is going on?" said Arthur, putting his head in. "Kathleen! What brought you here to wake Bride up at this time of night? And pray, miss, how did you know you would not encounter me in my night-cap?"

"As if you wore such a thing. And, sure, one would think I'd never seen you in your bed before. Ah, now, don't scold me, that's a dear. I had some news for Bride. I'm going to be married."

For a moment, I think, Arthur fancied she had relented towards Cecil; but I interposed hastily:

"To Lord Headland."

"Oh! sits the wind that way, missie? So the handkerchief is thrown, is it? Well, I wish you all joy, Kathleen, for you would grace any position as long as you behave yourself."

She made him a saucy reverence, and he said laughingly:

"Let me have a good look at the future marchioness, that I may learn to treat her as befits her dignity."

Taking her hands in his, he looked down smiling into her face, and said:

"When did the happy man commit himself, Kathie? Was it on the river among the lilies and forget-me-nots?"

"Ah, not at all. He just deputed uncle, and uncle told me on the way to Portishead

House; and if I could not decide I was not to have gone on, for to appear there was to signify acceptance."

"And you went on?"

"It seems like it," she answered carelessly. "And when I got there I was received by the duke and duchess in a small room, and there was a great deal of fuss, and the duke announced it publicly at supper, and we were toasted."

"So that was the way of it?" quoth Arthur. "Very orthodox and proper. Every man to his taste. Uncle George arrived at a happy moment to undertake the duties of a parent."

"I suppose all the world and his wife were there to congratulate you?"

"Oh yes, every one." Kathie enumerated a string of names ending with "all the Geraldyns down to Bill."

"Not quite. Cecil had supper here; he was not well, so escaped the large party."

"He was well enough in the day," said Kathie coldly. "Well, I must to bed."

"Ah! there is return news for you, Kathie. We are ordered off to Ireland."

"But you won't go, Bride?" cried Kathie aghast. "I won't let you; I cannot spare you."

"We will talk that over to-morrow, Kathie," Arthur said kindly; "it is very late now, and I have to be early to-morrow."

With a few more kisses she went, and I looked at Arthur in silence.

"Well, Bride," he said at last, "what objection have you? Could anything be more in accordance with the most strict rules of etiquette?"

"Is that his idea of love-making?" I cried indignantly.

"You are hard to please, my dear. Cecil Geraldyn is off his head and desperate, and that is too romantic. Headland is matter-of-fact—proposes through the uncle, presents a magnificent diamond ring, as you may have seen, will doubtless make ample settlements, and yet you are dissatisfied."

"Do you believe she loves him?"

"No," Arthur said gravely. "She may do so hereafter, but I will swear no girl could speak of the man who touched her heart, looking one in the face with those great eyes of hers untroubled as a baby's; she never dropped them once, or looked moved, but when I spoke of the river."

I was up betimes next day to give Arthur and Larry their breakfast; the latter was to return early to Hounslow, and Arthur resolved to go with him and report himself fit for duty.

Larry was much excited with the prospect of more active service, though he regretted it was not to France we were bound. But Ireland was better than nothing in his esti-

mation, and he went about his preparations singing:

"The colonel's sword sprang from its sheath,
And with a smile he said:
'Brave men of gallant Wexford, who wear King George's red,
I feel a thousand times more proud—
I swear by this good sword—
That I'm your colonel here to-day, than being a British lord.'"

Which ditty he varied with his favourite

"Love is the sowl of a nate Irishman."

Breaking off about a hundred times to appeal to me for one thing and another, he at last alluded to Kathleen.

I was surprised the subject had not come out sooner, and asked if he did not like the match.

"Oh, it's a very fine thing intirely; but, Bride, whisper now: I wish he was Cecil Geraldyn, or Cecil was himself. No, that wouldn't be right exactly, but you know what I mean. He's a very good fellow; but sure Cis is a broth of a boy, and fond of her. It's a pity she can't have them both."

"If those are your views of morality, Larry, how many wives do you propose for yourself?" asked Arthur.

"Wait till I've tried one," said Larry with a grimace.

"I'm not clear he did not propose to my lady yesterday, Bride," Arthur said, turning to me. "I saw him gathering forget-me-nots for her anyway."

"Oh, get out with ye, Arthur. Sure, are you ready, man, for the chaise is?"

"I've been ready this half-hour. Bride, you must make our adieux to my mother; she is not visible. Present my compliments to our embryo peeress, who is also, I suppose, asleep. And you, dear, are going at once to Lady Geraldyn's?"

"To consult her about my packing-cases? Yes, I will go as soon as you are off. She keeps early hours, I know, so it will not be too soon to disturb her."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"But can the noble mind for ever brood,
The willing victim of a weary mood?
Shame to the coward thought that e'er betrayed
The noon of manhood to a myrtle shade!"

Lady Geraldyn was busy in her morning room when I arrived.

She was the very reverse of my mother-in-law, who rarely left her bed till one o'clock.

With her usual bright decisive manner, she entered into the subject of packing-cases, on which Arthur had bade me consult her, as her great travelling experience made her an excellent authority on such matters.

Having advised me on that, she offered her congratulations on Kathleen's nuptials, and I bethought myself to ask after her son.

"To tell the truth," she said, "I have not been near him yet. He sent down and asked to have his morning coffee in his room, and, like a coward, I bade little Joan carry it, and tell him about Miss Kavanagh. He would be less fretted by the child's way of putting it. Do you know, my dear, if it is not treason to ask such a question, was he rejected yesterday?"

"Yes, he was."

"I am glad of it," she said. "How wonder-

ing you look. But at least, now he will not have it to rankle that, had he taken the earlier chance, he might have succeeded. He has tried and failed, *voilà tout.* Bride, how came your sister in the water?"

The abrupt question startled me, and I felt my colour rise under her scrutiny.

"Kathleen gave me no further particulars," I said.

"And you suspect nothing?"

"What am I to conclude? That Mr. Geraldyn pushed her in, as the hero of nursery rhymes treated the cat?"

"Because she refused him," said his mother laughing. "Well, no; but I cannot help fancying he knew more about it than he pretended to. My dear," she went on, with a sudden change of voice, "I cannot tell you how I thanked you in my heart when you carried that boy off to row you. What good impulse prompted you to do so?"

"Arthur did," I said simply.

"Ah, you are the one as good as the other. Arthur saw what Cecil's mad rashness was leading him to, and that no hand but a woman's could guide him right. If you two had not combined to help me, the boy might have been in his shroud by now. He was bent on provoking Headland to fight."

"He might have thought better of it."

"Men do not repent till too late, child. I had a brother just Cecil's age, and so like him,

and he went out bright and well, and was brought back with his fair hair all stained red and he run through the heart. Ah, *mon Dieu!* how it haunted me last night!"

She put her hands before her eyes for a moment, then went on:

"And after we had started I felt myself a monster of selfishness, and dreaded that, in his reckless state, Cecil might be a dangerous oarsman. I was indeed thankful to see you arrive; and when he told me he was still to attend you, *ma foi!* I could have sung for joy."

"Is he better to-day, do you know? He was indisposed last night."

"I could be heartless enough to wish him a slight illness," Lady Geraldyn replied with a half-sad smile. "Men are difficile when in health; sick they are saints."

Mr. Geraldyn opened the door at the moment, but was about to retire. His mother called to him.

"Cis, *mon cher*, do not disappear. Mrs. Gordon will pardon that fine morning gown of yours."

"I did not see who your visitor was," he said advancing. "May I present myself in this gorgeous present of Flora's?"

"You may," I replied, "as part of my mission was to inquire after your health, and see if you had overcome your chill of last night."

"Oh, I am quite well," he said, "thanks to your care, Mrs. Gordon."

He did not look so, for he was very pale, and his rich crimson cashmere morning gown showed it.

"What ailed you, Cis?" said his mother, laying her hand on his arm fondly.

"Nothing much, mother. I think that the river mist chilled me; but I do assure you, between Mrs. Gordon and Arthur I was quite spoilt. I feel I ought to be at death's door to-day to prove I was not an undeserving object of pity."

"Will you take great care of Mrs. Gordon for ten minutes? And after I have arranged the dinners, you may escort us if you behave yourself."

"With pleasure. Where to, mother?"

"To choose travelling-cases, in which your military wits may help us a very little, perhaps, sir," and off she went.

As the door closed on her, Mr. Geraldyn turned to me hastily, saying beseechingly:

"Tell me, is this true about Kathleen?"

"Quite true," I answered, feeling the fewer words the better.

Almost fiercely he exclaimed:

"Did you know of this last night, Mrs. Gordon, when I was with you?"

"I did not; it surprised me almost as much as it could have done yourself."

"Thank heaven for that. I began to believe

your kindness as false as everything else, a mere blind to keep me out of the way lest I mar their triumph."

"You will be less unjust when you are cooler, Mr. Geraldyn, but this has come on you suddenly."

"Ah, you may well say so," he exclaimed. "God help me, it is more than I can bear."

He threw himself down on a couch, burying his face in the cushions, and I could see his whole frame quivering with long gasping breaths that were more painful than sobs to hear.

Lady Geraldyn opened the door, but with a glance at her son closed it again noiselessly, making me a quick sign expressive of comprehension.

I wished she had remained, for I felt such a struggle of feeling best unwitnessed by a stranger, and yet I could not bear to leave him alone without an attempt at comfort. The knowledge of my presence acted as a check, and helped him to self-control.

He mastered himself sooner than I expected, and said gently:

"I beg a thousand pardons, Mrs. Gordon; forgive my forgetting myself thus."

I said a few words of regret for having stayed when he would perhaps have wished me away; but he said:

"You are so kind to me I do not mind your knowing, only don't despise me for my weak-

ness. I could not help it; and if I have not utterly disgusted you, Mrs. Gordon, don't give me up quite; do let me have your friendship still."

"Indeed I will," I said earnestly, "for I am so sorry for your trouble; I wish it could be otherwise. But believe me, it is best for you that there is now no doubt as to Kathleen's feelings."

"Certainty is better than indecision, but I had not given up all hope," he answered sadly.

"Just what I thought; but now you must do so, and turn to something else."

"To what?" he asked, with a weary smile. "I will try and do anything you tell me, for I don't seem as if I could think for myself."

"Can't you leave London?"

"Ah, you mistrust me still," he said impatiently. "You are tender of Headland's safety."

"Do you suppose I shall say I want you to fight him?" I said. "I am not ashamed of wishing him left unmolested; but I was really only thinking if you were at work you would feel this less."

"My work is dancing attendance on the ladies at the castle, and playing the carpet knight."

"Where is your regiment?"

"Probably you are going out to relieve it, but I am A.D.C."

"I suppose you can get a change if you like?"

"Arthur would tell you it's all I am fit for," he said with a smile. "He had a low opinion of my soldiering qualifications."

"He has seen little of them lately; and besides, you are a man, and you have strength and courage. Are you going to throw away your life in weak, vain regrets for a woman who has rejected you, and show your defeat openly? I will not promise to hold much regard for you if you have no more spirit than that. I hate cowards."

I had roused his pride at last, the colour came to his face again, and he said:

"You are a true friend, I am ashamed of myself; but at least I will not hang out the willow publicly, and if I cannot forget, I will promise to control my temper and——" he paused, and added, "and keep out of Lord Headland's way as much as may be; don't ask more, Mrs. Gordon."

"No, I will trust you on that; you will neither be so untrue to yourself or to Kathleen as to seek to force a quarrel on him now, for it would be none of his seeking."

"You know how to strike home, for all your softness," he answered. "If you will not give me up, I believe I shall be saved from myself yet."

"May I ask if you are going out in that splendid Indian robe? I shall wish to be

saved from your company if you are," I answered, thinking we had had enough of strong feeling.

"I will put myself into something a little less striking," he said with a smile, leaving the room.

I waited a minute and ran off to Lady Geraldyn's dressing-room, where she sat anxious and troubled.

"Where is he?" she exclaimed.

"Gone to put on his coat," I said demurely. "He is all right again; don't be so troubled, Lady Geraldyn;" and seeing the tears in her eyes, I kissed her, and she returned it warmly.

"If ever you have a son, Bride, you will know what my gratitude to you is for taking Cecil in hand. Oh, these boys, these boys, they do try their mothers' hearts. I do wish you were not going away, child."

"I daresay you can do far more than I."

"No," she answered. "Boys don't often turn to their mothers in these troubles; and, God forgive me, I wished so much for Cis to choose an heiress, that I have shut myself out from his confidence by my own fault. Oh, I am only too grateful that a good true woman has gone out of her way to stand by him from pure kindness, and not just for the sake of his good looks."

"I do not see what his looks have to do with it."

"No, Bride, it does not need a witch to tell,

you see no face but one," she replied smiling. "But there are plenty of coquettes to console a man because he is young and handsome, with a view to catching his admiration in the rebound; and you, I verily believe, would as soon trouble about Lord Verular if he needed it."

"Do you think he is likely to be disappointed in love?"

"He was a great admirer of your sister," she returned merrily. "Perhaps a fit of the gout will carry it off in his case. Bride, I am a silly, fond old woman, but I do wonder your sister resisted Cecil, unless she disliked his small means, and she is young for that to influence her."

"Possibly because she is so young, he was hardly old enough to attract her."

"He is not so much younger than Arthur, but perhaps he is boyish in some ways," Lady Geraldyn said, "and women do admire their opposites certainly. Could you have fallen in love with him, Bride?"

"If I say no, you'll be offended. If I say yes, you'll accuse me of being a coquette," I answered laughing. "I shall run off to the children; best, too, he should not think I have revealed his confidence even to you."

"You are a dear, good, wise child," she said, "and quite right, so be off."

I went to visit my small friends, who clung to me, and would not let me go till Mr. Geraldyn himself came for me.

He was even more than usually faultless and dandified in dress, and made his little sister Joan fetch him a dainty rosebud for his coat; and so far from wearing the willow openly, he talked so naturally and at his ease of the betrothal to all the chance acquaintances we met, that I could hardly believe he was the despairing lover of half an hour since, and though he walked home alone with me after our shopping was done, he said no more of Kathleen.

My resolution to accompany Arthur did not please the home circle. Lady Rachel fell in a violent passion, and, as usual, declared it was entirely Arthur's fault, when she should want me every hour, and what good should I be to him? If he were stupid enough to get wounded there were surgeons. To all of which I replied respectfully, and said I regretted to differ in opinion, and was more than grieved to leave her, when I could be of service, but my resolution was fixed.

Whereon she threatened to send Kathleen home, as the charge would be too much for her.

I assured her uncle would be ready to escort Kathie back at any moment, and I had myself thought it might be best. But this annoyed Lady Rachel worse than before, for, in reality, she had set her heart on the *éclat* of the wedding taking place from her house; and altogether it was just impossible to please her.

And Kathie was almost worse to deal with, for she clung to me like a child, coaxing and beseeching me not to leave her. Between them both I was fairly distracted, and thankful when uncle walked in.

"Eh, what is to do here?" quoth he. "Niece Kathleen enacting Niobe? What, tired of your fine match already?"

"Ah, not at all, but I can't part with Bride," she said.

I explained the matter, and begged for uncle's opinion.

Snuff-box in hand, he considered the matter sagely, then said :

"Niece Kathie, as you monopolize the present attentions of lover, friends, future relations, and my humble self, I am of opinion that it is unreasonable to my good nephew Gordon to wish to rob him of his wife's company into the bargain."

"He is taking Bride to all manner of danger and discomfort," said Kathie petulantly, "and I want her more than all the rest put together."

"I have some recollection of such words as 'for better, for worse' in the marriage service," said uncle drily. "But no doubt it would be much more important that Bride should remain to choose your wedding fineries, than that she should be at hand to see to her husband's comforts."

"Ah, uncle," I said, "that's hard on Kathie,

it's natural she would wish me to stay with her now."

"Natural enough," he answered. "Come Niece Kathie, run along and make yourself presentable, or his lordship will think you wish to be off your bargain."

CHAPTER XXV.

"Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain."

KATHLEEN disappeared, and uncle sat down by me and said:

"Niece, did you ever read the fable of the man and his ass, who in striving to please all pleased none?"

"Oh yes," I said, "of course I have."

"Well, my dear, avoid imitating him; your duty lies plain before you—go with your husband."

"Oh, I am so glad you say so," I replied, "for between Kathie and Lady Rachel I'm getting bewildered."

"My dear niece, let matters arrange themselves here, I will take charge of Kathleen. As she is to be married, it may as well be soon. Lady Rachel charged herself with it; if she regrets her offer, I will find ways and means. I have other friends in town."

"How good you are, uncle," I cried.

He looked at me drolly.

"What, for helping two more fools to entangle themselves in the matrimonial snare, whether suited for each other or not?"

"But do you think they are not?" I said anxiously.

"I did not engage to think at all, Niece Bride, and marriage is a lottery. Could I have chosen for you, it would have been a simple country life, and behold you are qualifying successfully for the opposite."

"Thank you! At least you will admit the betrothal was sudden at last."

"Yes, I will own it took me by surprise, when the duke begged me to settle it last night."

"The duke! Did Lord Headland have no voice in the matter?"

"Oh, he was present when our conference took place in the orchard."

"Why could he not speak for himself?"

"Possibly he took warning by young Geraldyn's repulse, which was very patent. That lad is not going to show the white feather to-day. I met him just now, looking anything but a broken-hearted suitor. However you used your feminine witchery last night, it has put him on his mettle."

"The advantage of being niece to a professor of the black art."

"I was no wizard when I let you into that secret at any rate," he said. "Come, niece, tell me about yourself and Gordon, now."

I told him all I knew of the regiment's destination, and then we talked of home, and I wondered if father and mother would come to Kathie's wedding.

"It is a long, wearisome journey, and expensive," uncle said. "In these bad times

that is a matter for thought. Larry has cost your father a pretty penny just now, but to get him under Gordon's care was not to be missed. Well, well, Bride, I wish Kathie no better sort than yours."

"You need not," I said.

"No, Gordon's a good kindly nature. I declare it was a lesson to an old selfish fellow like myself to see his concern for that hot-headed boy last night, whom I should have left to his fate without stretching out a finger to him."

"Uncle, I should fly in a passion if any one else dared say such a thing of you. You know very well it is a fib."

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, looking rather guilty, and having as usual recourse to his snuff-box. "A silly young fool, more or less, is no great matter, but that fine woman, Lady Geraldyn, mother-like, is wrapped up heart and soul in the fellow, so perhaps for her sake I might have tried my hand."

At that moment Mr. Geraldyn was ushered in.

"You will pardon my intruding myself when you must be so much occupied, Mrs. Gordon," he said. "But I am come on a mission for my mother. She wishes to present this little case, and sends a thousand apologies for it's not being perfectly new; but it was made in Paris after her own design, and she could not get another without some delay."

He handed me a leather case, which, if not new, certainly showed no signs of being worn. It was little larger than a work-box, but was fitted with knives, forks, spoons, silver drinking cups, plates, even cruets, for four people's use, so compactly and ingeniously arranged, that it seemed almost impossible so much could go in so small a space.

I had never seen anything of the sort, and was delighted. A little practice was required to rearrange it the first time, and while we were busy with it Kathleen entered in walking attire.

I had a momentary thrill of dread as to how the two would meet whose last parting had been so angry; but I need not have feared. With his usual graceful courtesy Mr. Geraldyn advanced to her bowing low; and raising her hand to his lips he offered his congratulations in the most easy and appropriate words.

Kathleen's colour rose slightly, as was but natural and becoming, as she thanked him with equal politeness for his felicitations, and then came up to look at the little campaigning case, as my new acquisition was called.

She admired and commented on it in her usual outspoken way, and when uncle asked where she was going to, as he had not invited her to take the air, replied saucily, "she was not dependent on his escort."

Five minutes after, Jervis announced that

the Duchess of Portishead was in the carriage at the door awaiting Miss Kavanagh; and with punctilious observance Mr. Geraldyn bowed her out of the room, leaving Jervis and the footmen to attend her to the carriage, and taking leave of uncle and myself, retired a few minutes later.

"Race counts for something," remarked uncle sententiously. "That youth acted his part to perfection, and it was difficult. Kathleen's was awkward too, for I would lay my life their last parting was on different terms. The girl is fit to be a peeress; she looked straight into his eyes without moving a muscle, as if no protestations or reproaches had ever passed between them."

"It was easier for her as she cares nothing for him; and after all I hope he is getting cured," I said.

"Niece Bride, I have not lived so long without knowing something of my sex, and I have always remarked that men make fuss enough over a scratch, but are silent when hard hit. For all his cool bearing, it cost Cecil more to face Kathleen so calmly than it would have done to lead a forlorn hope. There are plenty of Kathie's admirers bemoaning their woes openly about town to-day, who wish to be thought inconsolable; but this is a very different matter."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Away with merry bound our horses start,
And thread their passage through the baffling throng;
And rolling ever-restless baffling roar
Of brain-bewildering London; soon we leave
Some of the roar behind us. Swifter now,
With less and ever less impeded course,
We pass into a crisper, freer air."

LATE at night Arthur returned, having had an encounter with highwaymen on Hounslow Heath, which he seemed to have quite enjoyed.

The regiment was to march to Portsmouth and embark from thence. The colonel had offered to let Arthur go by coach and join there, as his sick-leave was not up, but he would not shirk his duty.

Of all the ladies belonging to the regiment, Mrs. Saville and myself were the only two going in the transport. Of the rest some were engrossed by nursery cares, some were too fine or too timid to go to Ireland at all, but preferred their ease at home, and one or two dreaded the long sea route, and talked of going by Dublin packet later, when the regiment settled somewhere.

I was to go by coach to Portsmouth, meeting "Mammy Saville," as the colonel's wife was nicknamed by the officers, and wait with her at an hotel till we could embark.

Uncle undertook to see me safely started as Arthur must return before I left.

There were a thousand things to arrange, and Arthur had not a spare moment between visits, purchases, and other matters.

I fancied Lady Rachel, indifferent as she seemed to him, would show some feeling at the moment of parting. He went to take leave of her in her room, for she had not troubled herself to alter her usual hours.

She sat in a rich quilted satin peignoir, with a handful of silk patterns, which she was examining carefully, and looked almost surprised at our entrance.

"Ah," she said, "I forgot, you are going somewhere, are you not? Let me see, where is it? Ireland? Dear me, why couldn't you go to France? I want some real Chantilly lace sadly. There is not a bit brought to England now, and the shop creatures are so tiresome. Bride, just see if any of these silks match this pattern; I am positive they are a shade out."

I took the pieces without a word, for I felt too angry to speak.

Arthur conversed with her for a few minutes, telling her of his intended movements, to which she listened hardly at all, and when a little timepiece struck the hour exclaimed suddenly:

"Bless me, is it so late? Impossible! Arthur, have you anything more to say of

importance? I vow I shall be hours late as it is at my Lord Wingham's sale; all his effects go to the hammer to-day."

Arthur rose at once, saying:

"I will not detain you from so important an engagement;" then, with a touch of feeling in his voice, he added:

"Will you not give me a parting kiss, and wish me good speed."

She just turned her cheek to him very coldly and indifferently, saying as he kissed her:

"Ring for my maid, Bride. And are you certain about those silks, child? Dear me, you are going with Arthur now, and I want you for a dozen things."

"I will return when he has left the house," I replied.

"The old story," Arthur said as we went upstairs; "worse sons have been more beloved."

Then as we paused outside our room he bent down and kissed me tenderly, saying:

"It matters little now I have you, my own wife."

If Lady Rachel's parting had been cold, the warmth of others was enough to atone.

Kathleen broke down and cried, calling him her dear kind brother, and had to be teased into indignation with allusion to her future dignities before she could command herself, and then she kissed him half a dozen times.

And poor Jervis, who was very sincerely attached to the son of the master he had served so long, followed Arthur about from room to room, trying to find some little service to render him.

Arthur shook hands with him at the last, saying cheerfully:

"Good-bye, Jervis; take care of yourself, and keep some of the old Madeira till I come back."

"Oh, good-bye, Master Arthur, God bless you and keep you," said the worthy man with tears on his cheeks. "I never saw you go so willingly before, sir."

"Glad to get rid of me—eh, Jervis?"

"No, no, sir, you knows better; but it's such a comfort to think as you have some one to take care of you. I only wish my dear master had lived to see this."

And quite overcome Jervis disappeared into his pantry just as uncle came for a few last words, and then Arthur ran down to his carriage among the good-byes and blessings of the household in general, who were taking a last glimpse from various corners.

I was to leave very early next day, and Kathie, refusing all invitations, spent the last evening alone with me, and we talked of all our old childish memories, and our dear home and its inmates; and then of her marriage. She seemed quite happy and content with the prospect, though she deeply regretted that I must leave her at such a crisis in her life.

And when bedtime came we shared the same bed once more, and slept in each other's arms as we had done so often before in our happy, untroubled girlhood.

She acquiesced quietly next morning to uncle's decision that he alone would take me to the coach, and our adieux must take place at home, as he had more than the ordinary masculine horror of a scene.

It was a most lovely summer morning, and at so early an hour the fashionable world was not yet astir, and the town was quiet as we drove through the streets to the inn whence the fast coach started for Portsmouth.

Uncle talked cheerily and pleasantly to keep my spirits up after my parting from Kathie; but I was bright enough, and anxious to prove myself a true soldier's wife.

When we reached the inn yard the coach was ready drawn out; the jolly red-faced coachman stood by enjoying a parting glass with a friend, and keeping an eye on the under-strappers who were giving the horses a last rub over though their coats shone already like satin.

Two or three young men, evidently officers, were swaggering about the yard talking and laughing, and seeing my new travelling cases whispered, and nudging each other laughed.

"Bride and bridegroom, I'll lay you a dozen," said one young dandy aloud, fixing a glass in his eye and staring at me.

"Insufferable young puppy!" said uncle testily.

"Old gentleman's waxing jealous," said another very young man.

"I'd like to cane you, sir," muttered uncle to himself; then added in a loud tone, "Guard, come here."

"Yes, sir," said the civil guard touching his hat.

"I put this young lady in your charge, guard; she goes with you to Portsmouth to join her husband, who is bound on active service with his regiment."

This announcement reached the young gentlemen, and at once produced a marked difference in their behaviour, for they were in truth only rather in wild spirits and meant no harm.

A fat old lady with two bundles tied up in coloured handkerchiefs now bustled up, then came a thin angular spinster with a bird-cage a lap-dog and several band-boxes, a respectable girl followed with a baby; and then the horses being harnessed the guard proceeded to bestow his passengers and their goods inside, the young men climbed up outside, the coachman prepared to mount the box, when there was a prodigious clatter of wheels and into the yard dashed the Geraldyns' carriage, the splendid grey horses all in a lather from the pace they had come. Cecil Geraldyn in travelling coat and cap sprang out, and he

and his father handed out Lady Geraldyn and little Rose and Joan.

Seeing a passenger of some importance the coachman delayed, and touched his hat civilly, and the guard and the Geraldyns' man made a fuss over the luggage.

The children espied me at once and ran up delighted, followed by their mother, who exclaimed:

"Why, I thought you were off, my dear. Cis, look, here is good fortune for you."

"Indeed, I never expected such luck," he said taking off his cap, "though I hoped to meet you on board; I am going in the transport."

"Yes," said Lord Geraldyn. "Cis only got his orders yesterday, and has had a fine rush to get off in time. I spent half the day at the War Office to get leave for him to go with the —th."

The two young gentlemen, who were already on the coach, now greeted Mr. Geraldyn, and announced they were also going with the —th, and Lady Geraldyn seized the opportunity to whisper:

"Bride dear, you will say a kind word to my boy sometimes, won't you?"

"Indeed I will," I said.

"Time's up, gentlemen and ladies," said the guard.

"You will look to my niece, Geraldyn," said uncle; "I shall feel much more satisfied to know she is with a friend."

"Thank you, sir, I will take every possible care of her. Good-bye, mother dear."

And amid many good-byes Mr. Geraldyn sprang up, and I being shut in we went off at a spanking pace. My companions were not the most entertaining, and both baby and lap-dog were cross.

The fat woman ate peppermint and some one had a camphor bag, so I did not find my position too pleasant, and wondered if it would be as bad all the way, as it was a long journey.

However, when we were quite clear of streets and houses and were walking up a long hill, Mr. Geraldyn, who had got down to walk, appeared at the door.

"Will you not come out and enjoy the air?" he said making a face of disgust as he became sensible of the peppermint. I was glad enough to do so, and he introduced the other young officers, one of whom in a frank boyish fashion apologized for having mistaken uncle and myself for a newly-wedded pair, and in laughing over this we grew friendly, and I was sorry when we reached the top of the hill, and I prepared to re-enter the stuffy conveyance. Seeing me hesitate a little Mr. Geraldyn pressed me to come outside and the others joined eagerly. I doubted the propriety, but they overruled my faint scruples, and I was too thankful to be out in the fresh air, and able to enjoy the pretty country we were passing through.

"I thought Mrs. Saville was to accompany you," Mr. Geraldyn said after he had established me comfortably.

"Oh, I meet her about half-way. She is in the country."

"Do you know her?"

"Not at all. I know the colonel."

"My godmother, and the best old soldier out," said one of the other youths. She is devoted to her regiment, that's why she's called "mammy." She nurses them, scolds them, advises them, and, O, ye gods, her wig! wait till you see it!"

"Where are we likely to pass the regiment?" remarked Cecil.

"Shall we pass it at all?" I said. "I really know nothing, for I have lived in a constant bustle and really hardly heard a word beyond what I was to do myself."

The coachman was consulted and opined we should overhaul them about noon, as they would probably call a halt at the town where we stopped to refresh ourselves and change horses.

And he proved himself correct, for at the very place named, as we came up at a good round trot into the market-place, we found the arms piled, the soldiers resting under the admiring glance of every lass in the town, and on pulling up in front of the inn our arrival brought half a dozen officers to the door, including Arthur and Larry.

We all went in to lunch, and the fat old lady and the spinster were quite overcome at finding themselves among so many military men, and the latter ogled, sighed, and languished, to the great delight of Larry and several more wild boys, who proceeded to make love all at once, till the sentimental soul knew not whether she were in a dream or in real life, so charmed was she. They attended her to the coach and stood kissing their hands to her to the very last, vowing her image was imprinted on their hearts; while Arthur, who had ascertained the odours pervading the coach and given most decided sanction to my remaining outside, helped me up, bade Mr. Geraldyn take care of me, and we were soon out of the town and away through the pretty country roads among the fields and hedges, passing many gentlemen's seats, concerning each of which the jolly coachman had some long story to relate, and pausing in the little villages to hand out parcels or letters, where the coach was the great event of the day, and the driver and guard were hailed familiarly by their Christian names and the pretty girls nodded to them from the cottage doors. Now and then the guard played an air on the bugle which sounded not badly on the wind. Altogether it was a pleasant ride.

The rapid change of scene and bright sunshine kept us from feeling tired of it all, and

even Mr. Geraldyn's spirits did not flag, though once or twice when the men got down to walk up the hills I saw he loitered and relapsed into a silent fit.

Later in the day we drew up at another little inn, and there stood a tall, stout, strongly-built lady, whom I guessed at once to be Mrs. Saville. She wore a bottle-green dress, a spencer of more comfortable than elegant shape, as it was short and adorned with several pockets and lapels like a coachman's coat, which did not improve her already broad shoulders.

Her features were almost masculine in outline, and her high forehead shaded by a wig which was of bright auburn, possibly the original colour of her hair; this was looped in two very wide plaits on each side of her face and kept place by a broad velvet band fastened in the centre of her forehead by a large cameo, representing a ferocious-looking warrior of ancient Rome.

A beaver bonnet tied with plaid ribbon surmounted all this.

Yet for all her extraordinary appearance she had a kindly expression which won my liking at first sight, though I could hardly help a smile at her oddity.

"Hurra! godmother, how are you?" shouted the youth who had spoken of her to us.

"Bless my heart and soul, Jimmy, where

did you spring from?" she cried. "Guard, now be careful, man, with my trunk."

"Come up aloft with us," responded Jimmy, "then I'll tell you all about it, ma'am."

"I've something else to do, my dear. I'm looking to meet one of our boys' wives here; which is she, now?" and before I could explain, the good lady's head was in at the coach door, and she was cross-examining the inmates, and attacking the young mother of the baby as if she were denying her own identity.

"Here, here, godmother," cried Jimmy (otherwise Mr. Smith), jumping down and extricating Mrs. Saville by main force. "Mrs. Gordon's up here in our charge; you must come up too."

The others got down to help her, and with the aid of a ladder she arrived, exhorting "the boys" not to look at her ankles, for they would not admire them.

"So you're Gordon's wife, are you, my dear?" she said, giving me a vigorous shake of the hand. "I like your looks, child, and I like your plucking up heart to go with us; but dear, dear, what a little slight thing you are! However will you stand any roughing? You will be blown away in the first puff of wind."

"I hope not," I said smiling. "Really I am very strong, and I have had to stand a little roughing already."

"Bless my life, child, don't tell me you're the woman that nursed Gordon through his wounds in a barn; 'tis a moral impossibility!"

"It wasn't a physical one, luckily for him," put in Mr. Geraldyn.

"Now, Geraldyn, you've eaten sparrow-pie lately, I should think, to make you so sharp. Which of them are you, now? Cecil, Bill, or Rex?"

"Cecil, at your service, madam," he answered. "Bill is going to India, Rex is still at Eton."

"Well, I could swear you were one, by those yellow curls of yours. Dear, what pretty children you all were when you were in Paris, and every one used to turn round to stare at the blonde milady Anglaise and her curly-headed children. Where's Flora? out with her nabob still?"

"Just brought her five children home!"

"Don't tell me that! I must be getting quite a female Methusalem; it's only the other day she was a fat baby with a red coral necklace and red shoes. Have you passed our regiment?"

"Oh yes, we lunched with them."

"And how was Gordon standing his march? The doctors didn't over and above like it for him."

"Oh, he was not at all tired, he is quite strong again," I said.

"That's all right. The colonel says it is just

a miracle he's alive at all. And now I've seen you, my dear, I believe him, for how such a bit of a child managed with that great fellow helpless on her hands, Heaven only knows. I suppose you can use those little fingers for something besides twiddling a fan, anyway."

"I hope so," I replied; "my mother taught us everything useful."

"A very wise woman too. Ah, dear heart! when the boys bring back a new wife, it makes me sick to see the poor helpless dolls they choose, often sitting up to be looked at, not even able to sew their own fineries together. If you choose such a rag-baby, Jimmy, I'll disown you."

"Very well, ma'am; I'll ask you to cross-examine the future Mrs. Smith before I decide."

"Let's see, my dear," went on Mrs. Saville, "you're Irish; were you ever at sea?"

This question produced a shout of laughter from the irreverent "Jimmy," who exclaimed:

"That beats everything; do you think she came to England overland?"

"Now, young man, don't you take up your elders so quick for a bit of a mistake; for your wits will never set the Thames on fire, whatever your hair may do."

This retort turned the laugh against Mr. Smith, who was decidedly carroty, and Mr. Geraldyn remarked that by the look of the sunset he thought some of us might wish it

possible to get to Ireland overland before we were many hours older; an opinion in which the other officer, Captain Grant, joined.

"Why, it is most lovely," I said, wondering at their ideas. "Look at those rose-coloured clouds, and that beautiful colour below."

"Which is just what means mischief, Mrs. Gordon," answered Captain Grant; "those brilliant prismatic shades betoken a gale."

The coachman confirmed the statement but thought it might blow out to-night.

"I hope it may," sighed Mr. Smith.

"Bad sailor?" asked Captain Grant.

"Beastly bad," was the emphatic reply.

"Do you good," responded the captain heartlessly. "Mrs. Gordon, are you a sufferer at sea?"

"No, I do not dread it at all."

"Bravo! you're the best woman that's joined us for years," cried Mrs. Saville, bringing down her hand with a thump on her knee. "I might have chosen you myself. To hear all those silly creatures making such a fuss the other day about a little more of the sea! Said I at last, 'Ladies, I'm not the best of sailors myself, but I'll stick to my man through thick or thin, for that's what I married him for.'"

END OF VOL. II.